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CANADA CHET, THE COUNTERFEITER CHIEF; Or, Old Anaconda in Sitting Bull's Camp.

A TALE OF TWO BOYS' ADVENTURES.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER.

AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, "ROSEBUD ROB" NOVELS, ETC., ETC.



AND THE BRUTAL GAARD, LE GURO, WAS ON HAND, WITH HIS TERRIBLE WHIP, WHICH HE SEEMED TO TAKE DELIGHT IN PLAYING OVER THE BACKS OF THE OFFENDERS.

Canada Chet,

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OR,
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CHAPTER I.

THE YOUNG ADVENTURERS—A WARNING BY A GIRL.

THE past autumn was one of great beauty up in the far North-west. Warm weather prevailed longer than any previous season for a number of years, and consequently Nature was in her loveliest moods. The prairies were growing dry and dun-hued, and the trees were beginning to rattle down their leaves as the result of the early frost, when we open our romance in a location as hitherto quite neglected by the pen of the novelist and voracious historian—i. e., in the British possessions to the north-west of Minnesota. A land of singular beauty, with its vast rolling prairies, its level plains, its vast tracts of silent forest, its numerous clear streams and lakelets.

The day we have chosen for the opening of our romance was a calm sunny one in the early part of October, with a gentle but invigorating breeze stirring down from the boreal regions over the dun prairies and through the great silent forests. A soft moody haze hung about the horizon, while old Sol looked down smilingly, doubtless to see his round, good-natured countenance reflected in the bosom of crystal lake or flowing stream.

Two boys in a boat were leisurely descending a stream which ran through a dense forest of hemlocks and pine, and which was both wide and deep, the waters flowing sluggishly.

On either hand naught was in view but the dense and dismal stretch of timber; even the sky was almost hidden by the overhanging branches.

As their boat, a light, gayly-painted skiff, with two sets of oars, drifted along at will of the current, the two youths gazed around in awed silence, with an occasional glance at each other, in which were expressed wonder and anxiety.

The foremost youth, about eighteen years of age, was of a full, supple form, and fair, good-natured face, but was not handsome. His eyes were brown and sparkling, and his hair a half-shade lighter. He was attired in a handsome and serviceable hunting-suit, and equipped with a Winchester rifle, of the Centennial model, while his revolvers were fine weapons. Ammunition was carried in one of two leather bags, which were strapped to his back.

His companion was evidently about a year older, and in form was something of a curiosity. He towered aloft to the measure of six and a half feet, when standing in his boots, and was literally a living skeleton, as his skin was simply drawn over the bones, with not a pound of superfluous flesh in his make-up. His clothes sat loosely upon him, and his boots were the only thing that fitted him, and they were number 14s. In face he was thin and pinched as in form, with a sallow complexion, and little, greenish eyes that peered strangely from their sockets.

He was a remarkable contrast to strong, sturdy Hal Dayton, his companion, looking old enough to be his father. His name was Dave Laam, or as he was better known, Big Track; for it was declared that no man in the North-west could fill his track, with a human foot.

What should bring these two contrasts together, and so far out in the North-western wilderness can be readily explained, in a few words.

Both were sons of wealthy merchants, in Ottawa, Canada.

Being possessed of an adventurous spirit, their parents had equipped them, and sent them into the wilds, supposing of course, that a couple of weeks would satisfy their desire for "roughing it," when they would then return gladly and settle down to business.

But neither Hal nor Big Track had any desire to return until they had seen all there was to see, and consequently we now behold them many hundred miles from their homes, in the wilds of a thinly settled tract of the British possessions.

For the last twenty-four hours, they had been following the course of the stream, in the hopes of emerging again into the settled district of Quinnebog, which they believed to lie south of them. But the forest was seemingly endless.

"By Jinks, I'm gettin' tired o' ridin' along this way," said Dave Laam, as he glanced at his elegant watch. "It's gettin' on toward night again, and we ain't out of the woods by a long shot. My joints predict rheumatiz, unless we get out o' here."

"How much grub have you got in your pouch?" queried Hal.

"Nary a crumb!"

"Consequently we've got to shoot the first living object that turns up, or go hungry. My appetite is now having a tussle with my backbone."

"Two'n't do to shoot," Big Track assured, "for, don't you remember they told us up at the Forks about old Sitting Bull's being up hereabouts?"

"Hang old Sitting Bull! He ain't afraid of me, nor I of him. I'll run the risk, you bet, rather than suffer the pangs of hunger."

"Can't we fish?"

"Bother the fish! Haven't we subsisted on fish diet for the last twenty-four hours? I'm going to shoot something that walks or flies, be it bird, beast or Injun."

"Well, at least let's row on down the stream further, and see if something won't turn up, Micawber fashion. We've got two hours at least before sunset."

They mechanically seized the oars, and shot the boat along over the smooth, even surface.

The dips of their paddles and the rustling of the leaves among the branches overhead, were the only sounds that broke the monotony of the somber surroundings.

After pulling on for an hour, steadily, they again shipped their oars, as if by one impulse.

The trees had grown a trifle more open, and light came down from ahead.

But this was not what caused Hal Dayton to seize Big Track by the arm, and point to the eastern shore.

"Look! look!" he whispered, excitedly, "see! there on the bank. Who in the name of Jupiter can it be?"

Big Track looked as directed, and beheld a white horse standing upon the bank in plain view—a noble, snowy stallion, handsomely caparisoned, and mounted by a young girl, and a white one at that, even though her attire was that of an Indian princess.

She was young—less than Hal's own age, with a graceful, willowy form, and a round, pretty face, glowing brightly with health, a tempting mouth, large, sparkling eyes, and hair of a brown hue, which fell in waves to a tapering waist.

Her costume was gay, yet modest, and richly spangled with Indian beadwork and gold and silver ornaments, solid bands of gold encircling her wrists.

A rifle of Ballard's fine make lay in front of her, across the saddle. Altogether she made up a strange picture to view in the heart of a far north-western forest.

Big Track muttered an admiring ejaculation as he caught sight of the fair equestrian, for, although he was anything but beautiful himself, he had a keen appreciation of all that was.

"Who is it?" Happy Hal asked, excitedly. "Jove! she's a reg'lar beauty."

"She looks like an Indian queen or princess," Big Track replied, in a low tone. "But don't you go and get struck after her."

"Why not, you cheeky? Who's got a better right?"

"No one; but you'd stand no show. Beauty like mine always wins," and the young lanky rolled his tongue about in his cheek in a manner that made him doubly ludicrous.

The girl equestrian still maintained her position on the bank, and watched the drifting canoe containing Hal and Dave.

"I propose we pull toward her, and have an interview. She's white, clean out and out, and probably she can speak United States," said Dave.

Accordingly they pulled toward the bank, but she did not change her position, nor did her horse stir.

When they were a few feet from the bank, Happy Hal arose to his feet, doffed his hat and bowed low.

In reply, a low, musical laugh came back that caused gallant Hal to reddens.

The strange equestrienne was looking at him curiously.

"The young pale-face does honor to Hazel Eye, the Lily of the Forest," she said. "Why is it so?"

"We are surprised at finding a young lady in these desolate surroundings, and thought we'd ask about you," Hal managed to stammer, for the steady, unflinching gaze of the forest princess had literally abashed his self-possession.

"The pale-face is inquisitive, but is not the first one of the same characteristics," was the reply. "To one and all, Hazel Eye has no word of explanation."

"Oh! just as you please about that. But aren't you afraid to be alone in the forest, unprotected?"

"Not! Hazel Eye knows not fear in the forest alone, for it is her home—her hunting-grounds. She heard of the pale-faces' coming, and she came hither to warn them that they are surrounded by dangers. To retreat means death; to advance is perilous."

"Pshaw! you don't say so," and Hal gave vent to a whistle. "Who's going to hurt us—a couple innocent babes in the timber?"

"The young pale-faces have many enemies unknown to them. The great chief, Sitting Bull, is now monarch of these forests, and his warriors count many. He has learned of the two young pale-faces, and wants their scalps."

"The blasted old son-of-a-sea-cook! Say, Fatty, what do you say to parting with the upper circumference of your globe?"

"I'd rather not, for a choice," Big Track replied, with a cadaverous smile.

"Just my fix, too. Say, look here, Miss Hazel Eye! what grudge has old Sitting Bull got against the top-knots of a couple o' young roosters of our calibre?"

"Sitting Bull is a mighty warrior," the girl replied, "and he counts his conquests by the hundreds. He is a bitter foe to the white race; he hates them as the snake hates fire. They drove him from his hunting-grounds, and he came hither; and he has sworn to kill every pale-face who invades these hunting-grounds, which he claims as his own."

"But, is there not a settlement below here, somewhere?"

"Yes; the pale-faces' settlement of Quinnebog, or the Choppings, lie not far below. And it is there the young pale-faces are bound!"

"Exactly. And why does he not war upon these settlers of the Choppings?"

"Because they number many sturdy woodsmen and their families, and are strong. Besides, they

were here before Sitting Bull came, and are not at war with him and his braves."

"How many braves has he?"

"Many; but all are not Sioux. Some are renegades with painted faces, some are of other tribes. You seem to know all about it, young lady," observed Big Track; "you must belong to old Sitting Bull's caravan."

"Hazel Eye is a child of the forest. She has none to stay her; she comes and goes at pleasure; she belongs to no one!"

"But, see here, there is no Injun about you?"

"No Indian blood flows in the veins of the Forest Lily," was the reply.

"Then you are a friend to the whites, I take it. Give us your advice what we'd best do."

"Hazel Eye has no advice to give the pale-face youths. They come from a great distance into the wilderness, where there are many perils. They are armed, and are young and strong. Hazel Eye has only to warn them of the warriors of Sitting Bull and of Canada Chet, of Beaver Lake!"

"Who is Canada Chet?"

"The great Canadian trapper, who takes many skins each year. He, too, knows of the coming of the pale-face youths, and swears to drown them if he catches them near the great village of the Beaver."

"Well, let him drown. We've heard big stories about this Beaver Lake, and we're the very lads who are going to see it and trap there!" Hal cried, independently.

"The words of the pale-face are very brave, but Canada Chet is a powerful enemy."

"Pshaw! ye don't know us! We can lick half-a-dozen Canadians in a fair fight. S'pose we'd best slope for Quinnebog, eh?"

"The pale-faces must guide their own actions. Hazel Eye has spoken," and with these words, she turned and rode back into the forest.

"Sa-ay! Hold on! Don't be in a hurry," saluted Happy Hal.

But there only came back, in answer, a laugh, and the Forest Lily was out of sight.

Hal then turned to his companion.

"Well, Fatty, what's to be done? It looks kind as if it would be healthier for us in Ottawa about this time, don't it, than in this howling wilderness, eh?"

"No. We've just arrived at the Mecca of our desires, where we can get our fill of adventure and—Indians!"

He pointed as he spoke into the wood on the western side of the stream; then suddenly slid flat into the bottom of the skiff, pulling Hal unceremoniously after him.

Not a moment too soon.

The next instant several rifles cracked; bullets whizzed close over the sides of the boat, and the reports echoed and re-echoed through the great silent aisles of the forest.

CHAPTER II.

A DRINK OF MILK—FUGITIVES STILL.

THE rifle-shots were accompanied by wild yells, and carefully peering over the side of the boat, Big Track beheld the western shore swarming with painted red-skins, who were about descending into the water.

"The varmints are goin' to swim out fer us," he said to Happy Hal, who was crouching flat in the bottom of the canoe. "We're in a confounded fix and no mistake."

"Hark! what does this mean? The sound of horse's footfalls upon the left shore. Can Hazel Eye have returned?"

"I'll be hanged if she hasn't!" Dave replied, joyfully. "Hark! she is addressing the Injuns."

It was even so. The Forest Lily had returned, and her voice rung out across the water, her words directed to the red-skins, who had suddenly ceased their yelling as she appeared upon the eastern bank.

"Stop! what means this outrage? Has not the warriors of Sitting Bull had enough of warfare for one day, when their hands have become stained thrice over with human blood, and another fair slave has been added to their chief's lodge? Away! away! I say, and war not against the young pale-faces. Hazel Eye has spoken."

"The words of Forest Lily are of great wisdom," said a stalwart young buck, who was clad in the uniform of an under chief, "but Mink Cap is a chief nearly as great as the great Sitting Bull, under whom he serves, and he cannot bow at the words of the Forest Lily."

"Then, may the Demon of the Forest invoke his wrath upon you!" the girl cried, sharply.

At this the red-skins seemed to shrink in terror, as if some poisonous reptile had been dropped in their midst. They shook their heads with guttural exclamations.

"The words of the Forest Lily are stern and rebuking. What would she have Mink Cap and his warriors do?" the chief demanded, from across the stream.

"Hazel Eye would have Mink Cap and his warriors give up this warfare against the two pale-faces, and return to their village," was the reply. "If they disobey the Forest Lily, she will surely invoke the wrath of the Woods Demon upon them."

"Then it shall be as the Girl Ranger wills," Mink Cap replied. "The warriors of Sitting Bull shall return to their lodges, and suffer the pale-face dogs to escape."

The young chief spoke to his men, and all withdrew into the edge of the forest, where they saluted the girl rider, upon the opposite shore, and then disappeared into the depths of the timber.

Hazel Eye watched them keenly until they had disappeared; then she turned her eyes upon Hal and Dave Laam, who had resumed their seats in the skiff.

"The pale-faces are at liberty to go now, and had best make the most of the opportunity," she said, waving her fair hand down the river. "The red-man is as treacherous as the tarantula of the South, and the young pale-faces have not seen the last of them. Let them go."

"You bet your life we will, Miss Hazel Eye!" Happy Hal assured. "We haven't got much time to thank ye now, but we'll make up for it, some other time."

"Hazel Eye asks not for the thanks of the pale-faces," was the reply, and waving her hand, she wheeled her horse about and rode away into the wilderness.

"Now for a grand get up and get!" said Hal, seizing and locking his oars, while Big Track pushed off from the shore against which the boat had drifted.

"If we get caught again, it sha'n't be our fault." Seizing the oars, both layed to with a will, and the skiff shot along out into the deep silent stream like an arrow.

Over the waters they glided, swiftly, keeping a look-out on either side for red-skins. For, had not Hazel Eye said as much as that an Indian could not be trusted?

They kept on until it was about the hour of sunset, when they suddenly found the river merged into a lakelet of several miles in width—a glassy sheet of water, whose banks were locked with dense forests of pine.

To the northern side of the lake, a score of cabins were visible in among the trees, and a cloud of steam and smoke arising from a large shanty proclaimed it to be a saw-mill.

Near the center of the lake a tiny shoal of land arose from the water, and upon it, and all around it, were those compositions of mud sticks and stone, known to the trapper as "beaver huts." Several hundred of these strange *habitations* poked their heads out of water, making a strange and picturesque scene—an animal congregation.

"By Jove! we are in Beaver Lake," Hal exclaimed, as he gazed over the scene, upon which the dying sunlight cast a halo. "According to Hazel Eye, we've got right out o' ther fryin'-pan, into the fire."

"Hang the luck, yes," Big Track replied, with a growl. "Yet this is the place we were originally steering for, and there is no use of backing out, yet awhile. The first question we have before us, is—what shall we do?"

"Do? Why get back to shore, as lively as possible, and scull along under cover of the wood, until we can find a good place to spend the night. I propose we go ashore, and tramp into the settlement, yonder. There ought to be some kind of protection there, anyhow."

This was decided as the best course to pursue, and pulling into the nearest shore, they disembarked, and secreted their boat in a clump of bushes that fringed the bank.

Then, shouldering their rifles, they followed the curving of the lake shore, until they reached the settlement, which consisted of some thirty cabins, all built in under the shelter of the forest.

It was evidently a town for the purpose of producing lumber from the immense forests that stretched away in all directions.

There were no streets laid out, nor any fences, but every man evidently had built his cabin where it pleased him.

One or two shanties of sawed lumber were there, also, and over the door of one of these was a creaking sign, bearing the words—

"CHOPPINGS HOTEL."

There was also a grocery store, and a blacksmith shop, besides the steam saw-mill, which was running at full blast.

"Let's go in here and see how things savor," Hal said, and they accordingly entered the "Choppings Hotel."

It was a rough, ill-constructed apartment which they entered, with uneven floor and unplastered walls, and everything wearing a dingy appearance, at that.

A rude bar behind which was a cracked mirror; a rusty stove around which lay numerous quids of tobacco, and several tables and rough stools, comprised the furniture, unless we mention the individual behind the bar.

He was a rawboned, repulsive-looking wretch, with his sleeves rolled to his elbow, and his shirt open at the hairy throat—a man with bloated face, bloodshot eyes, and matted hair and beard, so ugly as to cause one to shudder to look at him.

He was smoking a grimy pipe, which he condescended to remove in order to stare insolently at the new-comers.

Hal stepped up to the bar independently, and motioned for Big Track to follow his example.

"Come, old covey, dish us out some good cigars," he said, reaching in his pockets for money. "Give us the best you've got, now."

"Hain't got none," was the gruff reply. "Got any soda-water, then?"

"Nary."

"Any champagne, for luck?"

"Nary."

"Any wine, then?"

"Nary."

"What in the deuce have you got?"

"Whisky and chewin'," was the laconic answer, as the individual shoved the pipe between his teeth.

"Whisky and chewin'!" Hal exclaimed, in disgust. "Got any smoking?"

"A pipe-full."

"Want to sell it?"

"No!"

"Got anything to eat?"

"You bet!"

"Well, let's have your bill o' fare."

"Hain't got none."

"Good Heavens! what have you got, then?" Hal demanded, half exasperated.

"Got turkey buzzard an' swill."

"What do you take us for, anyhow?" put in Dave Laam. "We don't want buzzard."

"Nor swill. We ain't hogs," assured Hal, gazing around in despair. "What else have you got?"

"A eucher-deck," allowed the individual behind the bar, quite suddenly, as if the bright idea had struck him as auspicious at this point of the interview.

"Worse and worse," growled Dave. "See here, you bleary-eyed Muldoon! haven't you got any bread, meat, or cheese, or milk, or—"

"Got swill," was the only answer.

"Well, what in the name of Jupiter Pluvius is swill, then?"

"Swill is milk," deigned to answer the host, loftily.

"Well, then, trot us out several quarts, and let us sample it," Dave ordered, overjoyed at the prospect of appeasing the cravings of his voracious appetite.

"Hold up. Don't be so fast," Hal cried. "Let's see how much the old galoot asks for his swill!"

"A dollar a drink, an' dog cheap at that," vouchsafed the proprietor.

"I should say so," Big Track growled. "Go ahead and fetch us some."

The man shuffled off, and was gone about an hour, during which time our young voyageurs had to amuse themselves as best they could.

"What has become of the chap?" Dave demanded, at last. "Ten to one he's fallen asleep, while on his errand."

"No, here he comes at last," Hal replied; and, sure enough, the proprietor of the hotel entered, carrying two ten-quart pails, brimming full of fresh, foaming milk, which he deposited upon the bar with a huge grunt.

"Give's yer money," he ordered, relighting the grimy pipe.

"You be blowed," growled Dave. "Where are our drinks of milk?"

"I'll allow that's two on 'em on the counter. Wat more d'ye want?" the host said gruffly.

"You don't call the bucketfuls drinks, do ye?" Dave gasped.

"Reckon I do," was the reply.

The voyageurs didn't wait longer to bandy words, but, slapping two dollars down upon the counter, then set to work at their novel drink. Each bucket was provided with a lip for straining and pouring purposes, and gluing their own lips to this each youth began to drink. And they drank and swallowed, and drank, until they could hold no more, when they relinquished the nozzles, and compared notes.

Hal had emptied his about a quarter of the way, while Dave had accomplished a good half!

The individual from behind the bar gave a grunt.

"Why don't ye finish up?"

"Look here, who is doing this?" Dave demanded, puffing and panting from his overgorge of the lacteal.

"What d'ye take us for, anyhow? a pair of reservoirs, or a couple of Welland canals? I reckon we're the ones that is purty near finished now."

The host chuckled, audibly.

"Werry small capacity," he observed, filling up his pipe with pulverized weed. "Werry small capacity. That's them in this city as kin drink one o' them tin cups empty ten times, inside o' ten minutes, by their moon."

"You're a liar, and I'll bet on it," replied Hal; "or else this place is inhabited by human hogs."

At this juncture loud voices were heard coming through the woods in the vicinity of the tavern.

The host vaulted over the bar, and peeped out of the door rather nervously. When he came back, he looked so grim that Hal and Dave involuntarily exchanged glances.

"See hyar, young fellers," he said, stopping in front of them. "I opine you've struck an unhealthy latitude. My name's a legion uv honer in this yere town, but I'm an old sinner ef Capt'n Canada Chet an' his gaing o' cusses ain't pintin' fer this werry shanty."

"Well, what of it?" Hal Dayton demanded.

"What've they got to do with us?"

"Waal, now, ye don't want ter let 'em git hold on ye, ef ye hev'n't a likin' fer a bit o' hemp, Piccadilly collar style, an' an elevated limb."

"You mean they'd lynch us?"

"Waal, I opine they would. Leastwise, ef ye couldn't lick twenty on 'em, that would be yer fate. Ye see as how Canada Chet purty much runs this hyar town, an' he don't allow no immigration, you bet! He sez he's got them picked out as he wants, and none others will be have. Now, providia' ye want escape him, how much'll ye pan out ef I hide ye till he gits gone?"

"How much'll you take?"

"A hundred dollars."

"Give you ten—that's every cent."

"Agreed. Hurry up—they're most heer."

Hal Dayton handed him a crisp United States X., and then he led them behind the bar, where there were several barrels.

Taking some keys from his pocket, he unlocked the heads-of two ordinary-looking barrels, and raised them on invisible hinges.

"Git in lively," he growled, "and keep yer nozzles ter ther bung-hole, or ye'll smother."

Then will you let us out when danger is blown over?"

"Yes, yes—get in."

Both Hal and Phil obeyed, and soon were locked within their queer places of refuge.

And not a moment too soon; for the door was flung open, and a swarm of stogy-booted, long-bearded and roughly-clad men burst into the room, and they heard a hoarse voice cry:

"Heer we aire, boys; but ripplin' blazes! where's the kids? Say, you, Abe Hooker, whar's them strangers?"

CHAPTER III.

THE DWARF DESTROYER—SITTING BULL.

CRACK!" The echo of a rifle report went booming through the wild woodland, answered in the distance by a death-yell. The time was night, and all nature seemed at rest, for a brooding silence hung over the woods, the waters, and the prairie, which stretched away in a vast unbroken expanse, a few miles north of Beaver Lake, beyond the timber.

Luna, beaming in the heavens, sent a great flood of mellow, whitish light over Mother Earth.

A man who had been crouching in the edge of the timber, arose to his feet, and wiped the barrel of his repeating rifle, with a rag.

"Another red hellion gone ter blazes, kerslap," he chuckled. "That makes fifteen, to-day, which ain't a werry bad average, I'll allow, fer a pilgrim o' my status. Fifteen, Old Sitting Bull, an' yet I ken't git a bead on ye. Waal, thar's better times a-comin'; an' ef the ancient an' remote leetle Darwinian, Old Anaconda, ken't get at ye, ther hull United States Constitoochin has gone ter silvers, an' no mistake. I'll go out thar an' raise that pesky warmint's ha'r, an' then get back ter my nocturnal roost. Wonder w'at the salamander were doin' out thar, a-crossin' the prairie, anyhow, at this time o' night? Spect sum devilry ar' afoot, anyhow, consarn their red pickers! Ef ever ther war a beast, bird or reptyle I hate, ef be an Injun."

The old fellow said this fiercely enough as if in dead earnest.

He was something of a curiosity to behold, this little old scout, such as you would not often stumble across very often in the Far West.

"Where men grow large,
With strength and courage great."

He was a dwarf, not over four feet four, in height, with strong, perfectly shaped limbs, large, iron muscles, and a trunk of prodigious strength. In every way he was a perfect specimen of well-ripened manhood, except in height, in which he was lacking. His face was covered nearly to the eyes with hair, which the shears had reduced to a harsh stubble, so that his glittering little orbs were all that lent his face any expression.

He was clad in a well-worn suit of buck-skin, with a beaver-skin cap upon his head, and belt around his waist containing a curious assortment of revolvers, knives, scalp, ammunition, etc. His rifle was a Winchester repeater of the 1876 model, and handsomely mounted with silver, and a diamond muzzle sight.

He slung this weapon to his back now, and stood for a moment gazing out over the prairie, upon which the moon shed so grand a flood of light. Away to the north-east galloped a horse—the riderless animal of the Indian the scout had dropped from his saddle.

No other object was in view to mar the harmony of the beautiful scene, as it stretched away to the horizon.

A smothered sigh escaped the little old man's lips, and he turned and glanced around him.

"Thar's danger afoot to-night for somebody," he muttered. "I ken feel it in my bones. I'll sail out an' see ter thet warmint's top-knot, an' then I'll take a scout toward old Sitting Bull's camp. Ten ter one I'll drop another before I soar back."

He accordingly threw himself in the grass, and crawled out upon the prairie. Too old was he in the wisdom of the wilderness to sally boldly forth upon the prairie, and run the risk of a fusillade from the timber, for a hundred of the enemy might have been concealed therein without his knowledge. He preferred stealth to risk, as the true scout ever does.

Stealthily he crawled along until he came to the spot where the savage lay stretched out upon the prairie, stark and silent, a horrible distortion of his features evidencing the fact that he had died hard.

As he gazed upon the savage, Old Anaconda gave a little start of surprise.

"It is Flying Eagle, Sitting Bull's best herald," he said. "I thort et wasn't no common Injun a-runnin' around loose in this fashion. I'll bet he's carryin' sum news ter Mary, an' may I be stewed fer pie ef I don't find out about sum keetle game!"

With very little compunction the dwarf scout "raised" the Indian's scalp, after which he proceeded to make an examination of his personal effects.

But he failed to find anything that he wanted, and he sat for a few moments in silent thought.

"Queer, dum my Doxy Ann ef it ain't!" he muttered, at last. "I calculate thet Injun war ther transporter o' news, an' he had it on paper, too, probably. But what has become of it?"

More cogitation suddenly brought to him a thought—one that was hardly feasible, sure enough, but still an idea worthy of testing. Might not the crafty savage have put the paper in his mouth?

"Bet a jug o' pizen I've struck ther head on the nail first pop," he chuckled, drawing his knife, preparatory to prying open the set jaws. "Heard o' wuss things than that, by a long shot. Thar was old Samantha Higgins out in Kalamazoo, who once hid a thousan-dollar diamond in her mouth, w'en she went off ther handle, fer fear her darter Sal would

wear it to her funeral. Great, illustrious ham-bone thet kicked old Jone in the larynx. Yes. A tall gal war old Samanth. Ther old heifer really hed a likin' fer me afore I tuk ter destroyin' Injuns."

By this time he had succeeded in prying open the dead savage's jaws, and inserting one finger, he felt about for the message. Surely enough, his "feeler" came in contact with a lump of pulp, or paper, which he drew out with a chuckle of triumph.

It was a piece of paper, upon which was writing, all wadded up tightly into a little ball.

With considerable eagerness the scout unraveled it and spread it out. The moonlight which poured down from overhead afforded him a chance to read it, word for word.

It ran as follows:

"To His Chiefteiny, Sitting Bull:

"Everything is working as well as you could wish. With my men I have surrounded the old trapper's cabin, and shall burn him out before morning unless he yields. At any rate, the girl, Milly Owen, shall be in the lodge of the great and noble chief, Sitting Bull, ere another moon rise.

"SAGOBOSKI, Assistant Chief."

Such was the main disclosure, with the following postscript:

"Beware of the scout, Old Anaconda, or the Dwarf Destroyer. He is abroad again, upon your trail, with the persistency of a bloodhound."

The old man coughed as he read this notice.

"They putty near hit ther mark, I'll allow," he muttered. "Ef I ain't ther wust dose o' paregoric old Sittin' Bull eyer encountered, when I git an interview w' him, I don't want a cent. So thar is devilry afoot, sure enough, eh? They're after old Jim Owen's gal, Milly, ther red coyotes! Wal, now, thar's bound ter be music directly if we know ourself—me an' my new gun, Judith. Ef thar ain't a sick passel o' red niggers seen in this kentry afore ther Dwarf Destroyer turns in his vote, why I don't want a nashional or constitoochinal copper."

Riding through the forest went the girl Hazel Eye, or the Forest Lily, as she was called by the Indians.

She was a graceful equestrienne in every sense of the word; then, too, her horse was one of excellent mettle, who was accustomed to threading the mazes of the forest at full speed. He seemed by instinct to select the avenues clearest of undergrowth, but many a time a low growing limb would sweep over the saddle. But at such moments the Forest Lily was clinging dextrously to the side of her milk-white steed, with all the apparent ease of an arctic performer.

Indeed, upon the western plains, it is not seldom we see men and women ride as the most daring equestrian performers of the arena would not dare to ride, and all as gracefully too.

Hazel Eye was one of these wild riders, and was equally at home in the forest, or upon the prairie.

After leaving our young adventurers upon the river, she rode away rapidly through the timber, in an easterly direction, taking a regularly beaten trail which she had traversed many times.

In the course of an hour, by taking a circuitous route, she came out upon the bank of Beaver Lake, directly opposite the Choppings.

Here stood a large log cabin, with several windows up under the eaves, and a heavily ironed oaken door, which was closed.

Dismounting, the girl scout slipped the bits from the mouth of her horse so that he might graze upon the luxuriant herbage which grew upon the bank. She then approached the cabin door, and gave several taps upon it with her knuckles.

It was presently opened by an old man, with flowing beard as white as snow, and hair to match—a pinched-faced, withered man of some five and sixty years, clad in a flowing cloak-like robe of black such as might have answered the purpose of a monk.

"Is that thee, child? Why didst thou not return sooner?" this individual demanded, as he admitted the girl into a large, dimly lighted room, and took care to close and bar the door again.

"Why did I not return sooner?" Hazel Eye replied, dropping upon a couch of skins, with a sigh. "Because, grandpa, Meteor could not bring me faster."

"Knowest thou the doings of the devil in this section then?" the old man asked, going to a fire that burned upon an elevated hearth, and stirring a pot of boiling substance, which emitted a strange perfume.

"Ay, I know much more than I care to," the girl replied, wearily. "The warriors of Sitting Bull are on the war-path against such strangers as venture into this country, while Canada Chet is only second in fierceness and cruel brutality to the chief."

"Know'st thou if the Sioux chief and the Canadian are on terms of treaty?"

"No, I do not know anything about it. I should say not, though."

"I have been studying hard to-day, in magic," the old man muttered, seating himself upon a stool, and gazing abstractedly into the fire. "I have found and solved many new points. I have worked wonders out of nothing, and now, let them come!—let them come, I say, and I shall be ready for them."

"Fear not, grandpa, for no enemies will ever molest us here in this solitude."

"Thou hast not the judgment of my older years, child. I know that they will come—that they are even now upon the way."

"It is only your constant fear of them that drives you into the belief," the girl replied, removing her belt of weapons, and surveying herself in a cracked mirror that hung against the wall. "Surely, you are out of their reach, as who would ever think of looking for us here?"

"The devil could easily find us, and Casper Day-

ton would not be alive if he were not leagued with the devil, curse him."

"Why should you fear him, then?" Hazel Eye said, with a laugh. "Every one declares you an imp of His Satanic Majesty."

The old man chuckled, then remained silent for some time. But he spoke again, at last:

"Sitting Bull was here an hour before you arrived."

"Sitting Bull!" the girl echoed, her eyes dilating widely. "What brought him—here?"

"That you might easily guess. He has seen the grandchild of the Man of Magic, and fallen in love with her. He wishes to add her to the collection of wives already in his wigwam, and offers many hides and horses."

"And what did you tell him?" the beauty of the wilderness demanded quickly.

"I told him that the Forest Lily was her own guide—that he must present his petition to you, in person."

"Why did you do this, grandpa? You could have easily spared me the trouble of a meeting with the savage monster, had you chosen."

"I did for the best, child. We are two wanderers upon the face of the earth, with no one to look to for protection. Therefore, I would not call upon us the enmity of the great warrior of the Sioux."

"Then, do I understand you that you would permit me to become one of the slaves of that brutal wolf?"

"Nay. I would have nothing of the kind. I would have you stay ever with me. But this chief must have his conqueror, and you shall be his conqueror. But, ask me not the whys and wherefores, now, for this brain of mine is full of magic—full of mystery."

Hazel Eye made no reply.

She was used to the eccentricities of this old magician of the North—used to all his mode of living, his temper, his studies and his ravings.

Sometimes many people would have called him crazy, but she knew his wild moments to be due to excessive enthusiasm or dependency.

She had lived with him ever since she could remember—alone with him, having no companionship except his, his books and her horse. He had educated her in all that was desirable, but taught her to make no friends.

She left him, now, sitting over his fire, and went out into the wood at the edge of the lake.

Night had fallen, and although the moon was rising in the east, it was comparatively dark in the timber and upon the lake.

Standing upon the shore, she gazed across the silent sheet of water toward the Choppings, where several lights twinkled dimly.

"I wonder if the young strangers arrived safely over there?" she murmured. "I am afraid danger has befallen them for they are so unused to this life. I wonder what brought them into this wild, unsettled country?"

She stood thus pondering over the events of the day, when she was suddenly aroused by a hand being laid upon her shoulder, and glancing hastily up she saw a painted Indian standing close beside her.

She shuddered, for she recognized him as Sitting Bull.

CHAPTER IV.

SITTING BULL'S THREAT—AMASA SCROGGES.

THAT Hazel Eye was startled and alarmed was not strange. Since the coming into the British possessions of the noted Indian chief, she had entertained for him a loathing that surpassed her fear for his merciless savage tools.

She knew that he was little better than a human monster at heart—a man who, under all his paint and hideousness, had a brain which, for devilish invention, had no equal.

"The Forest Flower need not be alarmed!" he said, in a deep, hoarse tone. "Why should she fear the great chief of the Sioux?"

"Why should I not fear the great chief?" Hazel Eye demanded, shrinking away a pace. "Why should not the Forest Lily fear the chief whose hand has been dipped many times in the blood of her pale-face friends? The murderer of General Custer is no friend of Hazel Eye—never can be!"

"The pale-face maiden mistakes; Sitting Bull did not kill George Custer, even though Sitting Bull has tallied many conquests. It was one of Sitting Bull's warriors who killed the blonde general of the pale-faces; but the blame was laid upon me."

"You have a very plausible tongue, chief, but it cannot deceive the Lily of the Forest," Hazel Eye replied, fearlessly. "What would Sitting Bull, here, at the home of the Magician of the North—the home of evil spirits and strange transactions?"

A proud, disdainful smile lit up the hideous features of the chief.

"Sitting Bull is not superstitious, like his brothers," he said, grimly; "and therefore he has no fear of the Demon of the Wood, or his pretended powers. He has come here to take to himself another squaw to be the queen of his wigwam. There are three there now, but two of them are of Sitting Bull's nation. He would add the white Forest Lily to his possessions."

Hazel Eye stepped back, haughtily.

"The chief may return to his wigwam, then, for he cannot have the Forest Lily. Her hand is not for such as Sitting Bull!"

The chief gave vent to a deep grunt, as if he were surprised, and took a step forward. But he halted immediately, for revolvers in the hands of Hazel Eye were leveled at his naked breast, with its many

disfiguring scars and tattooed designs of wild animals, prominent among them the head and shoulders of a buffalo-bull.

"Let not Sitting Bull advance, unless he would court a merited death," Hazel Eye said, calmly, but sternly. "Let him return to his three wives and his wigwam, and forget the Forest Lily."

"Sitting Bull will go, for his life is at the mercy of Hazel Eye," the red demon said, a terrible glitter in his eye. "But he will not forget nor forgive the Forest Lily, for the bitterness of death is in his heart. Sitting Bull is no fool. His eyes can read the heart of Hazel Eye as well as they can the cipher rocks. She has seen the young pale-faces, and lost her mind. Sitting Bull wills it that they shall die."

And with a scowl on his fierce face, he stalked away into the woods.

Hazel Eye watched him with dilated eyes until he had disappeared. Then she restored her pistols to her belt, and glanced at the cabin. Within it was very light, and she knew that the old magician was engaged in some of his strange experiments.

"I must save the young pale-faces from Sitting Bull's wrath," she murmured, glancing across the silent waters of the lake. "I must save them, for he would kill them without mercy, should he get upon their track."

Searching along the bank of the lake, she soon came upon a light skiff rocking idly in the water. Casting off the thong lashings, she sprang in and seized the oars. Another moment, and the boat was skimming along over the water, headed toward the Choppings.

To return to the dwarf scout, old Anaconda, whom we left upon the prairie beside the dead savage.

Not long did he remain there. Crawling back to the edge of the forest, he paused and listened intently. He was a little uneasy.

A strange silence seemed to be brooding over all nature, more than was usual, even at the dead of night.

The moon shed down a spectral light—the wind even had lulled, and scarcely a leaf quivered.

"Something's up!" the dwarf muttered. "I've seen too many sech lulls afore a storm ter not know how ter read 'em. Them 'ar woods ar' chuck full o' red-skins as sure's I'm an anti-Injun lover. Ther varmints ar' abroad in big numbers, a-waitin' fer sumthin'. But I can't wait ter bother w' many on 'em, fer ef the Owens folks ar' in sad tribulations, it's high time this old projectile o' thunder and blazes war about."

Unslung his rifle, he held it in readiness for instant use, and then stole silently away into the edge of the wood, keeping the prairie not far to his left, and working along in a southerly direction.

Each step was one of stealth, as light as the foot-fall of a cat, and the little peering eyes of the Dwarf Destroyer were watchful on either side. Sometimes he would make a wide detour, to escape crossing a bar of moonlight that streamed down through an opening in the branches above.

In this way he proceeded for a half-hour, or so, when he suddenly came to a halt, and crouched behind a fallen log.

Just ahead of him, not more than a dozen yards distant, a tall savage stood in a moonlit spot, in an attitude of listening.

He was a noble specimen of the wild red-man, and was armed with a breech-loading rifle, and a knife.

The first supposition of Old Anaconda, was that his approach had been discovered, but a moment of listening convinced him to the contrary.

Afar off in the woods came the echo of a loud voice, pitched at a high key, singing that National olden-time song "Yankee Doodle." Whoever the individual was, he was evidently a stranger in the land of the great North, where life oftentimes pays the forfeit of death for penetrating those solitudes.

The vocalist was not particular, evidently, as to the selections with which he treated his audience, for he speedily branched off into the soul-stirring ballads "Capt. Jinks" and the "Girl I left behind me."

The red-skin seemed to enjoy the primitive concert, for his neck was craned forward in the direction of the sound, and his eyes gleamed wickedly.

Old Anaconda, from his covert, watched him, with a grim smile, keeping his rifle, however, in instant readiness.

"The varmint cacklyates, as how he'll hev ther pleasure o' raisin' thet feller's cap-sheaf, what be singin' like a black, double-headed night-in-gale, over yonder. Wonder who in Lord Harry he ar', anyhow? Sum greenhorn frum out in ther States, I'll bet my shirt on't. Ho! ho! how beautiful thet warmit thar would skulp him, ef ther Dwarf warn't around. Jest see his muscles work, as tho' he war goin' ter hev a reg'lar Fourth o' July celebration out o' ther greeny. But, poor, deluded mortal! I reckon he'll git slipped-up, on thet ar' cacklyation, muchly. Jest fer pie, I'll turn ther tables on him, and appropriate his skulp as he ar' intendin' to thet greeny s."

The savage having evidently enjoyed enough of the nocturnal concert, now began to glide forward, with stealthy motion, his sharp eyes gleaming wickedly.

Rising from behind the log, Old Anaconda glided noiselessly after him.

For some time the stealthy chase continued, Anaconda gaining all the time, until he was within easy reach of the skulking red-skin, who was entirely unconscious of the proximity of the dread Dwarf Destroyer.

Suddenly Old Anaconda raised his rifle, and swung it over his head with a lightning movement, and the heavy barrel dealt the unsuspecting savage a blow

beside the head that sent him crashing like a log to the ground.

The next minute the agile scout was astride his body; his flashing knife did the deadly work, and tore the scalp from the red-skin's crown.

"One more!" he muttered, hoarsely, as he arose from the ground, and stole away through the forest, "and still not enough. Were the whole cursed race o' red hellions dead, it would not pay for the wrongs I and others have suffered."

A few moments of swift but silent walk brought him to the edge of a small open glade in the heart of the forest, whence came the sounds of song. A glance explained all.

In the center of the glade was a roaring fire, built beside a dry old stump, and seated upon a log in close proximity to the fire, was the author of the singing, who had now branched off into the current epidemic—"Whoa, Emma!"

In one word he was a Yankee. This was evidence by a jack-knife in his hand and a piece of pine, which he was whittling.

He was a long, lank, bony individual, with an ideal Yankee face, buttermilk eyes, a large mouth, and hair and chin whiskers of a fiery red hue. His make-up corresponded with the invariable newspaper etchings of Uncle Sam, from the white plug hat to the striped breeches, and swallow-tailed coat.

A rusty musket with powder-horn and bullet-pouch constituted his only weapon of defense, while a wild hawk roasting by the flames evidenced the fact that he was not disposed to starve, even if he had to resort to the meaner fowls of the air.

Old Anaconda gazed at him keenly for a moment, then a smile hovered about his lips.

"A reg'lar, downright, out an' out Yank," he muttered, with a chuckle. "Wonder who he is, anyhow? Ten to one he's as ignorant as Cain, an' a big coward. Jest fer beans, I give him a test."

Slinging his rifle to his back, the scout got upon his hands and knees, and crawled stealthily out into the glade toward the stranger, whose back was turned on him.

Never did the Dwarf Destroyer move with more caution than now, as he crawled along.

A cat could not have moved with less noise.

Fully ten minutes were consumed in reaching a position directly behind the Yankee, who kept on whistling and whittling and singing.

"Gosh, tho', but it ar' ruther lonesum up hyar, seems to me," the whittler muttered, as he gave the fire an extra poke, thereby sending a shower of sparks, heavenward. "I don't reckon I'd like it heer, ter live fer good. I'd ruther be back in Michigan, every time. Bit then, I ain't doin' bad, a-gittin' six shillin' a day fer trampin' about, lukin' for somebody. Wonder ef thar's any Injines around these parts, or any buffers, or b'ars? They do say them b'ars ar' a monstrous tough anymille. Ho! ho! Sally Buckard, she sed I'd be afeard ter cum out inter ther West. Sed I'd run at first sight o' blood or an Injine. Hain't seen nuther, yet, but thar never war a Michigander as war a coward. Oh! hum,

'Mary had a little lamb
Wi' fleece as white as—'

"Thunder! Oh! Lord! Lord! git out! shoo! go 'way! oh! oh! oh! Julius Caesar Christofer Columblia!"

The scout had, before rising to a standing position in the rear of the Yankee, tied a cord to the bloody scalp he had so recently torn from the head of the red-skin; this he suspended upon the end of his rifle-barrel, and slowly lowered the repulsive object before the eyes of the man from Michigan.

The frightened man made one leap without looking around, and cleared both the fire and the stump, striking the ground only to fall flat on his face, where, for a full minute, he lay trembling and panting from fright, while, on the other side, Old Anaconda was rolling around on the ground convulsed with laughter. Hearing this noise, the Yankee finally arose and ventured around the fire, when the old scout arose, with a huge grin.

"Gosh all fried cakes!" the man from Michigan ejaculated, surveying the dwarf-scout critically; "who be you, Cap? Pears to me ye're a dasted little cuss ter hev whiskers on ye."

"Big enough ter skeer the fits out o' you, tho'," Anaconda snorted. "Great hatchet o' Washington! but you war skeert, tho'! Went kitin' over ther stump like as ef all the devils in purgatory were at your heels."

"Pshaw! I warn't skeert a bit, protested the man from Michigan, snapping his fingers. "I know'd you was behind me all the time, an' I jest got up ther sarsus for the fun of it."

"Git out! You war skeert n' ter de'th!" declared Old Anaconda. "Who be ye?"

"I'm Amasa Scroggs, from Kalamazoo, Michigan," was the reply.

"Kerwhoo! that settles it. Never see'd a man from Kalamazoo yit who warn't afeard o' his own shadder. But—"

The Dwarf Destroyer did not finish his sentence, for at this instant a chorus of fierce yells resounded upon the night, and a swarm of painted savages sprung from the forest into the glade.

And Sitting Bull headed the gang!

CHAPTER V.

INTO THE PEN.

The ruffian, Canada Chet, evidently meant his demand to be persuasive, for he accompanied it with a broad oath.

"Whar's them young Yanks as cum in hyar a bit o' go?" he repeated, glaring around like a wolf in search of some morsel of food. "Show 'em to me, while I dissect 'em! Say, you, Abe Hooker, whar ar' them Yanks?"

"Dunno. Hain't see'd any," Hooker replied, innocently. "If ye mean them two young Henglishmen, they've took their departure. Cum an' got a drink o' swill, an' then went off."

"You're an unmitigated old liar," Chet swore, angrily. "You've got them cusses hid, an' I know it. Didn't I see them same pilgrims come in heer, an' don't I know they didn't come out ag'in? You old lyin' thief, I b'lieve you've got 'em hid. Boys, make a search for them kids, an' I'll give a gallon o' straight whisky to the galoot as will find 'em."

This seemed to be a powerful inducement, for the wood-hawks set to work turning everything topsyturvy in search of the concealed voyagers, while Canada Chet grasped Abe Hooker by the collar and held a cocked revolver to his heart.

He was a fierce-looking ruffian, this Canada Chet—a large-limbed, powerful six-footer, clad in buckskin and armed to the teeth, and the embodiment of all the evils of passion and crime in the calendar.

The eyes were black and stern; the mouth was large and sensual; the black mustache that was of ferocious size reminded one of the Neapolitan brigands.

He was a man one need not care to anger unless he was ready for an immediate row.

With rude oaths his hand of roughs hauled things about promiscuously in the little bar-room, for they were all men after the captain's own type, and had no care for anything except plunder and adventure.

"My whisky—ther galoots will drink it all up," Hooker groaned, in anguish of spirit, as he saw the precious liquor flow freely down the throats of the ransackers.

"So much ther better," Canada Chet said. "It will larn ye in future to keep a better article ferther boys. Who owns this yere place anyhow, an' whar ar' ye grumbling about? Ain't I boss hyarbouts, I'd like ter kno'? Ain't Canada Chet ther king o' this yere region—the monarch o' all he surveys? Waal, I should remark thar same."

One of the searchers gave the barrels a whirl out from behind the bar, and sent them tumbling to another part of the room, where they would be out of the way.

As he did so, a faint sneeze came to the ears of Canada Chet, and he uttered an ejaculatory oath.

"Whoa up! thar's music hayr," he roared. "Take an ax an' knock ther hoops off'm them barrels, jest fer fun, an' let's see if we ken't find a couple o' fugitives. Oh! Hooker, you are no good at stowing away precious freight."

"Swow to gracious, I didn't stow nothin' away. Ef anybody's in them bars, they got in on ther sly while I was out-a-milkin'!" the tavern-keeper averred, stoutly.

The Canadian only smiled, grimly, and watched the men assail the unoffending barrels. With axes and other sharp-edged tools they drove the hoops off, and then knocked the staves apart.

And there, in cramped positions, were the two young adventurers from Ottawa. They were speedily hauled out, by ready hands, and held up before Canada Chet, for they were too weak from semi-suffocation, to stand alone.

The wood-ruffian surveyed them critically, an ugly expression upon his repulsive face.

"A pair o' babes in the woods," he said, sneeringly. "Say, ye young devils, w'at ever fetched ye to these parts? Didn't ye know thar Canada Chet war king o' these yere lattytudes, jest like Victoria aire boss, t'other side o' ther big puddle? Waal, I am thar same. I boss these hull British Possessions, I do, an' ary galoot as kicks against my monarchy, he gits a bu'sted head."

"Who said contrary?" demanded Dave, independently.

"No one, younker, an' ye needn't be so sassy, nuther. Mebbe ye hedn't heerd o' my engagement ter be married to Queen Victoria, soon? Waal, it's a fac', thar same. But, ye hain't told me w'at fetched ye heer, cusses on ye!"

"That ain't the finish of it—we ain't a-goin' to, neither!" retorted Hal, in the true border language.

"It ain't none o' your business what fetched us heer!"

"Ho! ho! we shall see if it ain't!" the Canadian cried, angrily; "we shall see ef Canada Chet ain't boss o' this yere hemisfeer. Fetch 'em along, boys, ter ther pen!"

And the ruffian turned toward the door, but stepped back with a growl of rage.

"Stop!" a stern voice cried, and Hazel Eye, the queen of the woods, stepped boldly through the open doorway, and confronted the chief. "Stop, Chet Howard, unless you would provoke the wrath of the Magician of the North."

The ruffian chuckled horribly.

"Once the old humbug, of the lake shore yonder, held power over me, but I've eluded his devilish spell. I no longer fear him, or any other pilgrim thet stands in boots."

"But you fear me!" Hazel Eye cried. "You dare not disobey me."

"And why not, pray, my pretty bird of the forest? How do I fear you?"

"I will tell you," Hazel Eye said, stepping toward him. Then, lowering her voice to a whisper, she uttered two words—a single name, and then gazed at him with a triumphant laugh.

For he had leaped back with a frightful curse, his usually red face grown as white as death.

"Devils seize you!" he gasped, with a shudder.

"What know you of—of—"

"I know enough to assure you that you have run nearly to the end of your halter; that your hour of doom is gradually but surely approaching!"

"An' ye dare ter imagine thet I'll surrender up these two younkers on ther strength o' thet name?" he demanded, with a leer.

"I think you will find it to your advantage to do so—yes," Hazel Eye replied, coolly, as she toyed with the hilt of her revolver.

"Then, I ken tell ye, I won't do nothin' o' the kind!" the Canadian swore, pushing her rudely aside, and bolting through the door. "Cum erlong, byees, an' fetch them 'ar younkers."

The ruffians obeyed their commander's orders, and Hal Dayton and Big Track Dave were forced along out of the tavern into the town.

Hazel Eye exchanged glances with them, and then darted along into the forest out of sight.

The hearts of the two voyageurs fairly sickened with dread. They had looked upon the strange and beautiful girl of the wilderness as being able to effect their rescue again; but it now seemed that her power over the ruffians had failed, and so they were doomed to be hustled off to some uncertain fate.

Dave Laam was the cooler of the two, for he had long since learned to master his feelings and to control his emotions.

Hal, on the other hand, was usually gay and careless, spirited when his sun shone brightly, but gloomy and downcast, when it was in under a cloud.

"I guess we'd better make an unconditional surrender, if so be that we can, and if we get a chance we'll skin back for Ottawa," he said, as they were forced along in none too gentle a manner. "I'd rather have another course through college, than much more of this life."

Dave laughed.

"You're getting weak," he said; "no use of that. They can't more than butcher us and cannibalize our bodies."

"You don't believe they'd do such a thing, do you?" Hal asked in alarm.

"Of course not, you goose! But wait, we shall see, more than we care to, no doubt."

They were marched along through the forest village by the roughs, who were headed by Canada Chet.

The rough citizens, and their families, stood in the doorways of their cabins, making no effort to stop the strange nocturnal procession, for afraid were they of the Canadian ruffian and his backers.

Many a time he had proven himself a human brute and cutthroat, and the people held him in awe. For he owned all the cabins in which they dwelt, and supplied them with work at the great mill, which yearly turned out millions of feet of lumber that was rafted down into the settlements, and oftentimes smuggled down into the United States.

Therefore these citizens, a class composed mainly of half-breeds and Kanucks, were in no ways eager to raise a hand against the man who was the means of their support.

Hal and Dave scanned the faces of these people, as they were hustled along, but could not distinguish one expression of pity there. They were rough and evil-faced, as a rule, and a softening look was unknown to them.

On along the forest-lined lake-shore were the two fugitives hurried, until a long barn-like cabin hove into sight, before the door of which they paused, long enough for Canada Chet to unlock it.

Then they entered.

Hal and Dave looked about in some curiosity, but were not greatly surprised at anything they saw. The building was divided into several rooms, the first containing a bar.

Here the whole crowd took a drink, and then Dave and Hal were both blindfolded, and marched away into an adjoining room, where they were stripped of their clothing and supplied with loin-cloths, such as many of the Indians wear during the hot weather.

They were then separately lashed to strong, upright beams, with their faces toward the beam, and then the coarse, brutal voice of Canada Chet spoke so that they could hear.

"Neow, you sneaks, we've got ye like a bug in a rug. P'raps ye'll consent ter give us yer names, now!"

"Yes—mine's Hal Dayton," that young voyageur announced, eagerly.

"And mine's Dave Laam," Big Track thought best to add.

"So ho! I thort ye would cum ter time, after a bit," the Canadian chuckled. "Next, if ye please, ye may tell us w'at fetched ye heer inter this kentry?"

"Three things," Dave replied, "a love of adventure, a desire to see the country and a hope to catch a few beaver, for which this place is noted."

"An' that's all, was et?"

"Every bit of it."

"Sure you never heerd any suspicions cast out, concerning this yere settlement?"

"Positive I did not."

"Waal, I guess ye're kareet, as I reckon no one ken't say much ag'in' our character as citizens. Howsunder, you've cum in hayr, a-pryin' about, an' we don't allow no strangers heer, I'll allow; so we'll give ye a lash apiece, and set ye ter work."

The lash was administered by a powerful arm, and cut a gash in each of the voyageurs' backs, but they refrained from expressing their pain in words.

They were now unbound, and taken into an adjoining room, on entering which, the noise of clanking machinery greeted their ears.

The bandages were now removed from their eyes, and they gazed about them in wonder.

It took but a glance to tell them that they were in a counterfeiter's den, on the outskirts of civilization.

Canada Chet, having motioned his men to retire, stood watching our young adventurers. The room was a large one, and lighted by lamps set in reflector brackets. In the daytime, sufficient light was admitted through the two narrow windows in the slanting roof.

Benches supplied with stools, lined either side of the room, while at the further end was a large smelting furnace in full blast. Upon the floor was a stamping machine turned by a crank, and also, a machine somewhat resembling a printing press.

Men, young and old, were working at the benches—at the furnace and at the machines—men stripped of all raiment except a breech-cloth, as were Hal and Dave; some of them as young as Hal, while they ranged upward to men of old age.

"You see 'em all!" Canada Chet said, with a wolfish leer; "ye mark 'em? Wal, they're all mine, an' so are you. You've seen the last o' the outside world, fer yer lifetime. In heer you're doomed to work in issuing counterfeit money, until ye aire ready ter put in under the sod. To ther right, here, ye see a sentry-box, containin' a man. He watches my slaves. At a sign of disturbance, or laziness among them, he pulls a signal, and in comes my lion, ter trim them out. I'll show 'im ter ye," and the ruffian made a motion to the man in the sentry-box, who in turn dispatched a signal for the man.

A moment later the door opened and he entered. A swarthy, low-browed, villainous-looking fellow he was, with a preponderance of the muscular, and as spry as a cat. He was armed with a thin-lashed bull whip, and there was a glare in his bloodshot eyes like to that of a madman.

"You're not wanted, Le Garo!" Canada Chet said. "You may retire. I only wanted these slaves to see you!"

The man bowed and retired. Then the chief turned to Hal and Dave.

"You see ther sorter man who bosses you," he said, grimly. "If you obey and work, all kerect; ef ye don't, he'll cut ye open. Your work will be ter turn that stampin' machine, hour 'bout, until a new recruit is nabbed, when you will be put at something else."

Then turning on his heel, the King of the North left the room, locking the door after him.

"We are doomed to imprisonment for life," Hal whispered.

"Not so," Dave returned. "Keep quiet; do as you are told, and we will outwit them yet. Take courage."

CHAPTER VI.

A SCRIMMAGE—THE HEAD.

THAT was an unenviable situation in which Old Anaconda and Amasa Scroggs were placed. Both saw the Indians simultaneously, and both were not a little alarmed. Had there been but a few of them, the dwarf would have had more hopes; but they numbered full a score, and were led on by the great chief, Sitting Bull.

Old Anaconda gave Amasa Scroggs a keen glance, a suspicion arising in his mind that this same man from Kalamazoo might be some treacherous renegade, whom Sitting Bull had placed out in the woods as a decoy. But it required only one glance to dissipate this thought, for Scroggs was as white as a ghost, his knees knocking together and his teeth chattering in affright.

"Oh, Lordy—Jerusalem! Holy Moses!" he gasped, endeavoring to get behind the Dwarf Destroyer. "Oh, Jewhittaker Jimminy! what shall we do? oh! what shall we do?"

"Shet your port-hole, an' we'll do ther best we kin, shoot me fer a fiddler of we won't!" Old Anaconda replied. "Can ye shoot?"

"Yes; I kin plumb a squar' every time at a thousand yards," Amasa assured, hopefully.

"Then cum behind ther fire hayr, an' when I fire you fire, an' don't waste a pin's head o' lead on anything but a greasy red-skin. D'ye heer?"

"Yes; I'm with ye, heart an' scalp!" the Yankee replied, with grim humor.

The two men leaped hastily behind the protection of the smoke which arose from the fire, and held their guns ready for rough work.

"Lordy! what awful-looking chaps!" Amasa muttered, glancing around the stump at the craftily-approaching foe-men. "Phew! what would Sally say ef she could see me now? She allus sed I'd never figger nor make a general. Bet a quarter o' beef I can make a scatterin' among them chaps over yander! Ready, little boyee?"

"Ready!" Old Anaconda replied. "Shoot certain. Now!"

The next instant, the report of two guns echoed through the surrounding forests. There was a responding yell from the red-men.

Old Anaconda had fired direct at the heart of Sitting Bull, but the bullet seemed not to take effect, for the terrible chief of the Sioux came on.

The effect of Amasa Scroggs's fusillade had been more disastrous to the noble red-men, for his musket had been heavily loaded with buckshot, and as a result four red-skins went to the ground, more or less wounded.

Anaconda noted the success of the shot with a grin.

"Good shot," he said, with a chuckle, "and, now, while ye're loadin' up, I'll keep up ther divartissement jes' fer fun, ye see."

And raising his repeater, he carefully aimed until he caught sight of a red-skin, when he "let drive."

Down went the savage, with a death-howl, while the Dwarf Destroyer gave a significant half-scream, half-yell.

"Another skunk on ther list, in atonement fer thet loss o' two years ago. Oh! but the list is gettin' long, yet my soul thirsteth for more. Come erlong, ye red-hued sons o' Old Nick. I'm ready ter accommodate ye;" and again the Destroyer's rifle went to his shoulder, and cracked several times in rapid succession.

Each shot was answered by a terrible yell, such as can only come from an Indian who has received his death-blow.

"Jerusalem! what kind o' a machine d'ye call thet?" Scroggs demanded, as he arose from the process of loading his musket. "Swow ter gracious ef that don't almost lay over my constitution."

"I should remark thet same," Anaconda observed. "Quick, now! Give the cusses another salute, while I replenish my magazine."

Scroggs proceeded to obey, and the cannon-like report of his gun soon burst out upon the night, followed by an indiscriminate pandemonium of yells and screeches of rage.

Old Anaconda peeped from behind the stump, then burst into a loud laugh.

Fifteen of the previous score of assailants lay prone upon the battle-field, while the remaining five, including Sitting Bull, were now skurrying for cover, at a high rate of speed.

The Dwarf Destroyer quickly sprang to his feet, and his rifle again flew to his shoulder, with that rapidity of aim and fire characteristic of him. But this time his bullet went wide of its mark.

"Wal, they're gone!" he muttered, as the last red-skin disappeared under the cover of the forest. "The next work is to raise the scalps of them out yonder, but thet job'll hev ter be postponed fer ther present. I opine we'd better git fer cover ourselves."

"Lordy! Jerusalem! Injuns thar," Amasa said, in alarm. "Guess I don't want to git my scalp raised."

"Ef ye ain't particklar about hev'in' it appropriated, ye'd better cum along wi' me," Anaconda replied. "What aire ye doin' out in this country, anyhow, Slab-sides?"

"Lookin' fer a job," was the reply. "Know uv anybody as wants to hire a cheap hand?"

"What kin ye do?"

"Wal, I kin 'most do anything, though I'll allow I'm thar when ye cum ter hoein' pertaters, huskin' corn or choppin' wood."

"Do you know how to lift the ha'r from the top-knot uv an Injun?"

"Oh! Jerusalem, no! Ye don't mean to say as you could hev ther heart to do sech a thing?"

"Waal, I'll allow, few know how any better'n yer uncle!" the Dwarf Destroyer replied. "I've got enough sculps up at my roost to make a fancy bed-quilt."

"Jewhittaker! what would my gal, Sally, say, ef she war ther heer ye say sech a thing? Folks ain't used ter sech quilts out in Kalamazoo."

"Kalamazoo be hanged!" Anaconda grunted. "Cum erlong, ef ye're goin' ter sail in my ship. It's high time we war skinnin' out o' this."

Taking an opposite course from that taken by the red-skins, they hurried into the woods.

Here old Anaconda threw himself upon the ground, and pressed his ear thereto.

He arose directly, and there was an anxious expression upon his features.

"Thar's heaps o' ther red hellions in ther wood," he said, peering keenly around in all directions; "an' consequently thar's work fer ther old Destroyer. I'm goin' ter Sittin' Bull's village, ter rescue ther Owens, ef they've been tuk thar, as I cacklyate they hev."

"W'at! Not whar all them Injuns ar'?" Scroggs gasped, in horror.

"Yes; perzactly thar," the scout responded; "an' ef ye ar' skittish about goin' along, ye can hev ther choice of stayin' heer in ther woods."

Amasa groaned. What was he to do?

To accompany the venturesome scout, as it were into the jaws of death, was a thing undesirable; while to be alone in the forest, possessed equal terrors for him, since he had learned of the presence of the Indians.

"Come! w'at are ye goin' ter do?" Old Anaconda demanded, impatiently. "Time is sculps wi' me, an' I can't afford to be foolin' about long."

"Guess I'll stay here," the man from Kalamazoo at last decided. "It's six o' one an' half a dozen o' t'other, w'ich place I stay. Lordy! I wouldn't go ter an Injun village no quicker'n I'd cut my own head off."

"Which, jedgin' frum ther size o' yer fly-trap, you are perfectly able ter do," the Destroyer retorted, with a grin. "Waal, good-by ter ye! Luk out fer yer hair, an' take my Christian advice an' shute every red skunk ye git a pop at. Tell ye w'at I'll do, Yankee Doodle! Jest you drap thet Sitting Bull, an' raise his hair, an' I'll give ye enough sculps ter put with it ter make ye a hunting-shirt—will, by gum!"

"Git out! I wouldn't do sech a thing. What would Sally say?"

"Sally be hanged. Luk out fer yer natteral wig, now, an' don't let no red-skin raise it!"

And with these injunctions the eccentric dwarf scout hurried away into the forest.

After he had gone Amasa Scroggs peered sharply around him, to assure himself that there were none of the savages in his immediate vicinity. None were in sight, which was to him as good as a blessing.

"Wonder whar I'd best skeddaddle to anyhow?" he soliloquized. "Guess I'll go South and see what I can find thar."

Taking from his pocket a compass, he located the desired direction and set off.

It might now be observed that he was more cautious in his movements, and that he betrayed some of the peculiarities of the scout by advancing stealthily, and keeping a sharp watch out on either hand.

In this way he tramped for several hours, when he finally passed to find himself at the edge of the same glade in which he and Old Anaconda had fought the battle with the Indians under Sitting Bull.

Yes, there could be no doubt of it, for there was the stump, in the center of the moonlit glade, still

burning, and there were the bodies of the slain savages.

He had become bewildered in his tramp, and returned to his starting point!

But hold! what sight is this his eyes behold?

There is an object of some kind moving about the burning stump—a strange, ball-shaped thing, whatever it might be, about the size of four men's heads combined.

From where he stood the Yankee had a good view of the thing, and his hair began to stand upon end, as he perceived that it was indeed a human head, mounted upon a pair of feet, by which it managed to move.

The features were all there, only upon an enlarged scale—the mouth, the eyes, the nose, the ears, and indeed, the whole face being perfect and natural, while the rest of the head and neck from the forehead over back was covered with long coarse hair like a buffalo's mane.

And this frightful object, literally a walking head, was moving about the burning stump, from which would occasionally emanate a glare of blood-red light, to be followed, perhaps, by a glare of green and blue.

Amasa Scroggs stood in the edge of the forest, and gazed at the strange spectacle like one dumbfounded.

"The devil's own region," by gracious," he gasped.

"Gosh all fish-hooks! I guess they don't raise nothin' but dwarfs up this way, an' thet 'ar cuss out thar don't look as ef et war human. Sumboddy's put a hull head on him, I'll swow ef they hain't. Leetler then ther dwarf Injun-killer, I'll swow ter gracious. Oh! Lordy! Jerusalem!"

These latter ejaculations were caused by a gigantic column of red fire shooting from the stump, into the air, and reddening the very night as with a shower of blood. It was as if the heavens and the earth were afire, for a few moments.

Then it died out, and the stump burned naturally.

The Yankee had crouched down upon his haunches, expecting instant annihilation, his teeth chattering like castanets.

"Oh! Jewhittaker, I want to go home to my Sally," he gasped, white with affright. "Oh! gosh all fish-hooks, this is a awful place. It's possessed by the devil, sure pop. Wonder whar has become of the Injun-killer. Bet he'd be skeart, too."

The Walking Head still continued to busy itself about the burning stump, as if, indeed, a herald of his Infernal Majesty, it had been sent down on earth to hold its infamous orgies.

Amasa crouched in the edge of the wood and watched. His limbs refused to move, and he could only squat there and behold the incantation.

"Gosh! Sally she'd faint, sure, ef she were here," he would occasionally mutter, with a fresh start at the roots of his hair. "Wonder if I shall ever git out of this scrape alive? Phew, but this be a look-in' fer them boys, in a horn. Wonder—Oh! thunderation! Lordy! Jerusalem!"

A new phase of mystery had emanated from the seemingly infatuated stump, in the shape of a vast swarm of squirming, fiery snakes.

They sprang in myriads into the air, in a hundred directions. A score of the writhing, hissing things made straight for the spot where Amasa Scroggs was concealed, as if to devour him in their fiery jaws.

This was too much for the poor Yankee from Kalamazoo. With a gasp he wilted right down into a dead faint.

For some time he remained in this condition, when he once more recovered consciousness, to see the Walking Head still engaged in his orgies about the stump.

Suddenly there soared a graceful column of fire into the air, resembling gold, and when at an altitude of a hundred feet, a single star detached itself from the expiring column, and burst into an avalanche of large stars of every bright color of the rainbow. These gradually dissolved in the atmosphere until the last star drifted slowly to the ground.

The Dwarf Demon now came suddenly rolling toward the very spot where Amasa was crouching, and with a howl of terror the Michigander sprang to his feet, and darted away into the forest at the top of his speed.

CHAPTER VII.

A HISTORY OF THE "PEN"—THE SCHEMER.

HAL and Dave Laam were set to work at the stamping-machines about an hour after their arrival. And the brutal guard, Le Garo, was on hand, with his terrible whip, which he seemed to take delight in playing over the backs of the offenders.

Dave turned the crank attached to the stamping-machine, while one youth of nineteen or twenty had in the alloy-box, coming forth from under the dies, the denominations twenty-five and fifty cents and the standard dollar. The work for our young voyager was very hard and tiresome, but he stuck to it, determined to suffer fatigue rather than receive a blow from Le Garo's whip.

Hal's machine for the printing of bills was less hard to manage, and therefore the work allotted to him was comparatively easy, as the press was fed by an old, gray-haired man of sixty years, whose form was bent, and hands long and bony.

One of the rules of the establishment was that none of the slaves were allowed to speak to each other during working hours, under penalty of a lash for each and every word spoken. This was even more torture to our young adventurers than though they were not allowed to breathe, for the two privileges were to Hal equally dear.

As soon as daylight shone in through the transoms in the roof, another gang of workmen were

brought into the room, and the previous gang, Hal and Dave included, removed to another apartment adjoining, fitted up with bunks and tables, the windows in the roof being heavily grated.

Here they were locked in, to make the best of their time until their turn again arrived.

Milk and roast fowl were spread upon the different tables in liberal installments, and the overworked slaves made hasty work of it.

Dave and the young man who fed his press, and Hal and his aged assistant, chanced to occupy one table, and accordingly opened a verbal acquaintanceship.

The young man's name was Harry Reynolds, while the elder slave rejoiced in the cognomen of Alex. Watchman.

After they had talked over the situation and their prospects for some time, the old man said:

"No; there is no hope of getting out of here, as long as the den is in existence. Ten long years have I served here, and during that time I have never seen one unguarded avenue of escape—not one! Everything is locked, barred, or guarded. As you may have imagined, this is one of the greatest counterfeiting dens in America—ay, I may add, in the world. All of the dies are so nearly perfect that it requires the most experienced expert to detect the bogus money from the genuine. The coins are of uniform weight with silver. Of the silver pieces we manufacture and perfect about a hundred dollars per day, while of the paper we issue from one to ten thousand per week, the denominations being one, two and five dollar bills. None of larger figure are issued, because it is these larger bills that the expert watches most narrowly."

"There must be an enormous amount of this currency abroad on the market?" Hal said.

"Yes, there is. Some banks may have large amounts of our 'queer' in their possession, unaware of its being bogus. The most of it, however, is circulated through the extreme West—in the mines and cattle regions, where expert detectors are less frequently met. And the same man never distributes the second time, in one locality, except in disguise."

"How often is this 'queer' shoved upon the market?"

"Once a month three men, armed with numerous disguises, start out, and their three predecessors come in."

"Were any of these circulating mediums ever caught?"

"Yes, on several occasions, but they always died mum."

"Canada Chet, I suppose, then, is the owner, and consequently the one whom the business most benefits."

"On the contrary, I am led to believe that the Canadian and his employees, are merely tools in the service of a ring of greater rascals, who have their headquarters in the East—men who have made their fortunes, and who have occupied at various times, and may yet retain high offices under both the Canadian and United States governments. Probably the world at large knows not how much counterfeit money they are daily handling."

"Could not these leaders be implicated, and brought to justice, think you?"

"Certainly not, for who could pick out the guilty ones, except those who belong to the ring—a brotherhood that never betrays?"

"It is not until lately that you began the manufacture of bills, eh?"

"About a year ago."

"Where do the steel engraved plates and paper come from?"

"Originally from Washington, but previous to reaching us they travel thousands of miles out of the direct route, in charge of a sharper, employed by the ring."

"How have you learned all this?"

"It would be hard for you to listen to a recital of how, by degrees, I have picked up my information. Ten years have been consumed in the task."

Harry Reynolds was a good-looking young fellow, and an enjoyable companion. He had been captured, a year before, while trapping along Beaver Lake, with a party of seven others—he being the only one to escape the massacre at the hands of Canada Chet.

Several hours of conversation ensued; then all hands sought rest upon the cots, preparatory to going on duty the coming evening.

Dave and Hal were in somewhat better spirits for their new companionship, although they each heartily wished themselves back in their comfortable homes in Ottawa.

Their chances of escape, however, appeared remote.

Canada Chet had a cabin of his own, not far from the "pen," where he usually spent his nights, waited upon by a half-breed lad.

On the morning following Hal and Dave's incarceration, the King of the North, as he was known among his intimates, sat smoking before his door, when a man rode leisurely up and dismounted. He was a stranger in the town, and Canada Chet eyed him narrowly, without speaking.

A man of some five-and-forty he was, with a portly form and florid countenance, which was for the most part covered with a long, heavy growth of brown, glossy beard. The end of his nose was delicately colored, and about his eyes was a combined expression of cunning, evil, and the effects of dissipation.

He was dressed in citizens' garb, with a Derby hat upon his hand, as he paused and bowed before the Canadian.

"Do I behold the Right Honorable Mr. Chester Howard?" he demanded, in soft, effeminate tones.

"Yes, I reckon that's me," the ruffian grunted. "What in thunder d'ye want, anyhow?"

"That is easy to explain, after we arrive at the subject," was the reply.

"My name is Casper Dayton; an uncle, by the way, to one of the two boys you took into your service, last night. I want to buy those boys—or, rather, one of them, my nephew, from you."

"They ain't for sale," Canada Chet growled, fiercely. "I opine you're on the wrong trail, pilgrim."

"And I'll allow that I am not," the other replied. "Just listen to me for a few moments, and I will convince you to the contrary. I have a little story to relate, which I believe will prove interesting to you."

"To begin with, I am the youngest of three sons, of a family of gentle blood, named Dayton. My paternal relative was at one time a millionaire in the city of New York. Of course, to make any family history complete, there must be one black sheep in the flock, and I was the one. At an early age I was a disgrace to my proud family, in many different ways, and was summarily kicked out into the world."

"My father and eldest brother finally left for the upper world, on an exploring expedition, and I being in prison at that time for burglary, the whole wealth was made over to my brother, who now lives in Ottawa, Canada."

"The property lies in New York State, and is all his, except one dollar, which I can claim at any time I choose to go forward, and risk being arrested as a forger. Ha! ha! Oh! you see, I am familiar to every phase of crime—a heart-hardened wretch, my father denominated me on his death-bed."

"Now, then, all the human individuality that stands between me and that estate, is this brother, and his son, not another heir being in existence. Therefore, I have ferreted the whole matter out, trailed the lad here, and now wish to purchase him, for spot cash. The old gent is on his way hither, I understand, but I chanced to get in ahead of him."

"An' so ye want the boy, hey?" Canada Chet interrogated, regarding his visitor sharply. "What would you do with him?"

"Take care of him, so that he would never lay a claim to the Dayton inheritance," the schemer replied, significantly. "Also, he should be so silenced as to never betray your secrets."

"My secrets!" the Canadian grunted.

"Yes—the secrets of the 'pen,' yonder, as you call it. He shall never cough aloud, even."

"Why! how in thunder do you find out that the pen had any secrets?" Canada Chet demanded, suspiciously.

"Oh! that's all right. If you want to know how, find out. I shall not betray you, nor shall I unwittingly betray myself."

"Cuss it! who ails ye?"

"Casper Dayton, at your service."

"Why not leave the lad whar he ar'? He's in safe quarters, I'll bet!"

"Not safe enough for my purpose. I'd rather see him six feet in under ground. He'd be surer not to trouble me then."

"What'll ye give?"

"A hundred dollars."

"Queer?"

"No—straight."

"Can't have the lad short o' a thousand, durn me ef ye can!"

"A thousand? That's rough! But give me time to consider, and I'll let you know later."

"Do as ye please."

"I have the freedom of the town, then?"

"Reckon ye do," was the curt response; whereupon the Canadian arose and entered his cabin, and Mr. Casper Dayton mounted his horse and rode away up the lake shore.

He had scarcely left the cabin when a clump of bushes near the door parted, and there issued therefrom the face and form of Hazel Eye.

She gave a hurried glance around to note that her movements were unperceived, after which she glided on through the wood in the direction taken by Casper Dayton.

"He is a bold, bad man, and I can but think that he is in some way connected with grandpa's troubles. He would take the life of Chet Howard, I believe, rather than not get possession of the boy, Hal. Such a man needs to be watched."

After riding on for a half a mile, the schemer, Casper Dayton, drew rein at the water's edge, and dismounted. Leaving his horse to crop the herbage, he drew from his saddle-bags a collection of wearing apparel peculiar to an Indian chief, and donned it over his citizen's garb, transforming himself into part of a full-fledged Indian. He next removed the superabundance of hair from his face, it being all false, and proceeded to daub his face with war-paint, and ornament his head-gear with a variety of painted quills and feathers.

After he had thus arrayed himself to his evident satisfaction, he stuck a couple of knives, and a tomahawk in his belt, and surveyed his figure by aid of a small mirror which he also took from his saddle-bags.

A chuckle seemed to convulse him, and he finally burst into an evil, ringing laugh.

"What a noble warrior I make, anyhow!—a full-fledged Indian cutthroat, no doubt. What will my good brother, Sitting Bull, say when I make my debut in his presence! Ha! ha! I did not tell the Canadian that another errand brought me here! My next duty is to hunt up the cabin of the Owens, for there is a fair gal there, whom I would make my wife—perhaps!"

He finished his soliloquy by mounting again, and riding on through the forest.

Without a noise the girl of the forest, Hazel Eye,

stole on in pursuit, until she reached the end of the lake, where she turned off toward the magician's cabin, while the schemer kept on in a north-easterly course which he evidently calculated would bring him to the home of the beaver trapper, Owen.

Hazel Eye hurried along swiftly, now, and soon reached the cabin of the magician. But it required the usual formality of knocking, before she could gain admittance.

The old man was busy about his laboratory, in some new experiment, and spoke not until Hazel Eye addressed him.

"Grandpa, a new stranger has come to the woods!"

The old man started, and wheeled upon her with a curious stare.

"A new man?" he interrogated, in evident surprise.

"Yes, and something tells me that he is the enemy you have so long feared."

"Ha! ha! I have made ready for him then!" the magician said, with a chuckle. "Let him come. But the name—the name, Hazel Eye!"

"It is Casper Dayton."

"Ah! then it is indeed the same," he muttered, with a groan. "He shall not surprise me, however, for I will watch for him—ay! I'll tell him!"

"Grandpa, tell me of myself, now—my life seems more shrouded in mystery than ever."

"Fret not. Thou shalt know of thyself ere many moons," the old man muttered, as he turned back to his magic.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE INDIAN BEAUTY—ANACONDA'S NEW DEPARTURE.

AFTER leaving Amasa Scroggs in the woods, Old Anaconda struck off to the north and strode swiftly along in a direction which he calculated would bring him into the neighborhood of Sitting Bull's village.

The route was free from underbrush and he was enabled to make rapid progress, even though he was dwarfed.

For the remainder of the night he tramped steadily along, without pausing to rest—without relaxing his vigilance, in the least. The woods had been his home, for years, and woodcraft knew "e by actual experience."

Toward morning he paused to drink of the cool fresh waters of a bubbling spring, which spread out in his path. Then he went on again, until day had dawned—the moon had fully hidden itself away, and the sun was showing its face above the eastern horizon.

He now came to a halt on the edge of the timber, where it was met by a beautiful stretch of undulating prairie, several miles in circumference.

Before him lay the village of the great Sioux chief, Sitting Bull, who, a fugitive from the land of his birth, had fled into the far North where American law had no control.

The village covered something like five acres of ground, and was surrounded by a high wall of adobe, which was topped off with a parapet of pointed sticks. To obtain access to the village, however, one had to enter through the gates upon the southern side.

Thus had the fugitive Sioux warrior ensconced himself behind a barricade as formidable as though they were in the days of another Crusade.

The tops of a score or more of lodges loomed a couple of feet above the top of this barricade, but this would not have deceived an old scout as to the population of the strange Indian city. Where there is one lodge, there is, as a rule, a half-dozen to occupy it.

And report had it that Sitting Bull had added largely to his band, both of red and white cutthroats; consequently, Old Anaconda had no doubt but that there were large numbers of the enemy in the village, in addition to those out upon the war-path, in the forest.

This did not deter him from forming the resolution to visit the interior of the village, come what might. It would be an adventure, and he wanted knowledge.

Many times had bits of gossip reached him concerning Sitting Bull's household captives. Report had it that the great chief of the renegade Sioux had many squaws in his wigwam to wait upon him—squaws of the red and of the white race, and squaws that were beautiful of face and form.

For it was said that the old warrior had a true eye for beauty, and would have no squaws at his fireside who were not pretty and possessed of a moderate portion of intellect and education.

It was to discover the truth of these reports that Old Anaconda particularly wished to visit the village.

The Owens were old friends of his, and if the chief had caused the gentle and winning Milly to be brought to his wigwam, the Destroyer's purpose it was to rescue her.

For some time he stood gazing down upon the village, in which no life was visible, on account of the high wall, except a few columns of white smoke which curled heavenward from the different lodge tops.

The morning was one of exceeding beauty, for so late in the fall.

The sun rose as bright and warm out in the east as in early summer, and flooded the prairie and forest with brilliant light.

Off upon the horizon hung a haze; a gentle and invigorating breeze blew in from the prairie; birds caroled in the sunlit branches, and the little prairie dogs barked from the summit of their burrows.

In vain did Anaconda watch for some sign of life about the village which lay below him in a flood of

sunlight, but he was disappointed. Not a sound nor a sight, except the white spiral columns of smoke, answered his patient watch.

At last he glanced around him as if intuition had warned him of the near presence of somebody or something. His glance brought forth an ejaculation, for not three yards away was an Indian girl, half-reclining upon a mound at the foot of a tree, engaged in working beads upon the moccasin she held in one hand.

She was the most beautiful creature, thought the scout, that he had ever seen, excepting none, white or red.

Her complexion was of an olive tinge, the features being as purely chiseled as if formed by the hand of an old-time sculptor, and the head admirably poised upon a graceful neck, which sloped down to a noble bust, and into the continuation of a form that was little less than perfection.

Such a graceful, sylph-like figure the dwarfed scout had never seen before, and he regarded her in admiration, she evidently all unconscious of his presence. Her hair of a nut-brown hue fell to her waist in a cloud; the eyes and mouth were of sweet expression—the former in color like the hair, and fairly scintillant in their power. She was clad in a tasty beaded skirt, and waist partly open at the throat revealing the beautiful neck. The skirt was met below the knees by fancifully wrought leggings and moccasins. No covering whatever was on the head, except a sort of coronet of feathers of many shades of the rainbow.

If standing she would have been about the medium height of women, and as Old Anaconda thought, over and over again, the most beautiful embodiment of the opposite sex he had ever conceived.

Resolved upon having a word with her, he advanced a few paces until she looked up with a startled exclamation, when he doffed his hat and bowed low. She arose to her feet and retreated a few paces where she paused, a scared, uncertain look in her wild, pretty eyes.

And now more than before, was the sylph-like and graceful proportions of her superb form revealed.

"Why is the Indian maiden abroad so early in the forest?" Old Anaconda respectfully inquired, speaking in the English tongue, for he was aware that not a few of the latter-day Sioux could speak that tongue.

The girl started and trembled, as if confused at the presence of a stranger, then spoke:

"Wild Bird comes into the woodland that she may listen to the songs of her sister birds, and where she can be alone and unmolested."

"Then ye don't like it down there in ther camp o' Sitting Bull, eh?" the Dwarf Destroyer asked, approaching closer, and throwing himself on the leaves at her feet, as she resumed her seat upon the mound.

"The heart of Wild Bird was never with the Sioux nation," was the reply, as her pretty eyes gazed off over the prairie, dreamily. "She was once of the powerful Pawnee tribe, but Sitting Bull has slain the last of her people, and brought the Wild Bird to his wigwam."

"Sitting Bull has many squaws in his lodge, has he not?" the scout asked.

"Sitting Bull has many wives, but Wild Bird is not his wife, nor are the two white maidens. Wild Bird is the Princess of the Sioux, and Sitting Bull respects her and allows her freedom, which he does not extend to the two pale-face maidens. They wait upon him, and do his bidding."

"And Wild Bird loves the Sioux chief, and will soon become the Queen instead of the Princess of his tribe?" the scout interrogated.

A startled look came into the Wild Bird's eyes at the suggestion.

"No; the Sitting Bull has no charms to attract the eye of the Wild Bird. He is a great warrior, but Wild Bird does not yearn to become the squaw of one of her own race. She has better hopes for herself. The pale-face does not abuse his wife like the Indian, and is much kinder to her."

"Waal, I'll be transmogrified inter a bar'l o' tanglefoot of thar ain't some truth in that, my gal! An' I reckon there's many a pilgrim as would grab at the chance to get sech a beauty as you fer a wife, ter love and take keer ov her!"

The eyes of the Indian girl brightened, visibly.

"Does the great hunter speak his true thoughts, or is he trying to blind the eyes of Wild Bird with flattery?" she asked, bending forward, almost eagerly. "Wild Bird would be as happy as the sunlight were she the wife of a kind white man. Her heart rebels against warfare, and she loves peace and the life of the pale-face hunter."

"Waal, neow, leetle gal, you're a clipper, an' no mistake! an' ef ther old Destroyer warn't quite so old, he'd be e'na'most of a notion ter pop right heer to one't, despite ther fact thet he's on ther trail o' vengeance. Did the Wild Bird ever heer o' ther white terror, Old Anaconda, the Dwarf Destroyer?"

The maiden's eyes dilated widely, as she replied: "Wild Bird has heard of the intrepid Indian fighter who is the great foe of the Sioux, and she has longed to see him."

"Waal, I'm them same, you bet, leetle gal! ther old hoss himself."

"Wild Bird is glad, for she has yearned to hear the cause of his hatred for the Sioux," and, with childish innocence, the Princess put out her hand.

The dwarf scout took it gently, and pressed it, after which he let it go, as if afraid to hold in his rough palms a hand so warm and soft.

"Waal, ye shall heer the story, Wild Bird," he said, gazing moodily down into the sunlit plain below them, his brows shaded by a cloud; "ye shall hear all about it, an' then mebbe ye'll allow I've hed sum reason fer liftin' so much ha'r."

"Ye see, me an' mine were ther fust, or among

ther fust, ter enter ther Black Hills kentry, previous ter ther breakin' out o' ther gold-fever. I hed my leetle cabin along one o' ther tributaries ter ther Rosebud, an' I trapped an' hunted, got a good livin', an' wer happy w' my wife an' child. Ye see I neyver war no beauty, an' when I an' my Daisy got hitched, I calculate she didn't marry me fer beauty, but because she liked me. Leasthow, she war a leetle angel of a wife, an' we allus got along as nice an' happy as ther day war long. Then, arter awhile, our leetle Fanny came, the pretty, sunny-haired leetle beauty, an' we counted ourselves supremely blessed.

"I trapped many streams, and collected many beautiful furs. We war in the third year o' our prosperity in our new home, an' hedn't neyver hed no trouble w' ther red-skins, when, suddenly one day Sitting Bull came to my cabin, during my absence, and murdered, and mutilated almost beyond recognition, my poor wife and sunny-haired baby. I returned home to find my cabin-home burned, and the scapless bodies o' my wife an' child lying close at hand. And thar, over ther bodies, I swore to have a Sioux scalp for every drop of the precious blood shed from their veins! God knows I have striven to make good my promise."

And as he finished speaking, the scout gazed at Wild Bird—tears in his eyes.

There were sympathetic tears in her starry eyes, for the Destroyer's narration had been told with a peculiar touching pathos, that stirred up the softer passions of her wild, untutored nature.

"Wild Bird's heart aches for the noble pale-face scout," she said, earnestly, "and her anger is strong against the Sioux. Sitting Bull is no warrior if he has murdered a weak and helpless babe. Wild Bird despises him. She would die sooner than to become his queen, now. Her heart is with the white Destroyer."

"Waal, leetle gal, I thank you, and I recky you an' I can get on as friends, anyhow. Would the Wild Bird leave the village of the Sioux?"

"Where would Wild Bird go? She has no home—she could but wander in the forest, where her sisters of the air have their coverts."

"But if some pale-face would offer to marry the Wild Bird, and take her to dwell with him in his cabin, would the Wild Bird go, even though the pale-face be dwarfed and not so handsome as many of his brothers?"

An eager light shone from the beautiful maiden's eyes, and arising she advanced and knelt before the scout, and kissed him upon the forehead.

"Wild Bird says yes," she said, earnestly, her bosom heaving, and an overjoyed expression upon her pretty, dusky face. "She hears the words of the pale-face, and accepts with a glad heart. Wild Bird's whole life-hope and dream is realized, if the pale-face brave will take her to his cabin."

"That settles it, then," old Anaconda said, drawing her to him, and kissing her cherry lips. "I feel thet the Lord put ye in my path ter make up fer my lost ones."

The beautiful Indian girl gently withdrew herself from his embrace and arose to her feet.

"Wild Bird's pale-face lover must not think to deceive or betray the Indian maiden," she said. "He has kissed her, and must not touch her again until she is his by right of marriage."

"All right, Birdie; an' thet sha'n't be put off long, you bet! My trail of vengeance ar' purty nigh at an end, an' then we'll go back across the line and settle down. Now, will the Wild Bird help me to rescue the white maidens from Sitting Bull's power?"

The Indian girl started, as if stung by a pang of jealousy.

"Why would the White Destroyer seek the pale-face maidens?" she demanded, quickly.

"Old Anaconda would rescue them from captivity and send them back to their homes, because they are of his blood and color. But, let not Wild Bird, the Beautiful, fear. The old man 'll stick to her, you bet! Not so very old, nuther—only eight-an'-thirty, tho' I've suffered pain enough fer fifty. Waal, waal, what's your ans'er, little pet?"

"Wild Bird will help the White Destroyer in his plans; she loves him, and will fight for him!" was the earnest reply.

CHAPTER IX.

IN SITTING BULL'S VILLAGE—TOO LATE.

WILD BIRD consented to return to the village, and prepare the way for the Dwarf Destroyer. The beautiful creature seemed wholly wrapped up in her warm affection for the scout. It had ever been her brightest hope that she might become the wife of a pale-face, and she was now happy in the thought that her dreams were soon to become a reality.

"But, hold up, Birdie," the Destroyer said, as she was about to take her departure; "there are a few questions I have neglected to ask you."

The Wild Bird listens.

"Then, who are the pale-face captives Sitting Bull has in his wigwam."

"Both are young squaws."

"But their names—what are they?"

"They call each other Milly and Rachel."

"Humph! The girl Milly has sunny hair, has she not?"

"Yes—hair like the summer sky."

"How long ago was she brought to the lodge of Sitting Bull?"

"Only last evening, from the trapper's cabin."

"And her parents were not brought with her?"

"No; they were massacred by the warriors of Sitting Bull."

Old Anaconda shuddered. He knew the Owens well, and a feeling of horror crept over him as he pictured in his mind the trapper and his wife lying

either roasting in the fire of their burning cabin, or rigid in death from a blow of the murderous tomahawk.

But, even as the picture was before his eyes, he swore a silent oath to continue his deadly work against the Sioux, until not one of the murderous race remained to follow the war-trail.

"Wild Bird must go, now," the beautiful maiden, said, "or Sitting Bull will return and discover her absence, and be very angry."

"So ther old cuss is out in the woods, eh?" the scout demanded, excitedly.

"Sitting Bull is abroad with many of his warriors," Wild Bird replied.

"How many are there yet, in the village, then?"

"Three braves and twenty squaws, not counting the papposes."

"Very well. Ef I ken't git away w' thet number, I'll sell out cheap. But, Wild Bird, are there any horses in the village?"

The Indian girl smiled.

"Wild Bird has four of her own, as fleet of foot as any upon the prairies," she said, proudly. "The pale-face lover of Wild Bird is welcome to them all."

"All right, my jewel; we shall have need for them soon. I am going to rescue the white gals, and bear them away from the village. Wild Bird must go along."

Where her face had fallen at the first words of his declaration, it now brightened gladly, and her deep, liquid eyes sparkled like diamonds in the sunlight.

"Wild Bird is glad. Her heart beats faster at the prospect of going with her pale-face lover. She will have the horses ready, and leave the gates ajar, so that the brave scout may enter the village."

Then, kissing her hand at the dwarf, the dusky beauty walked gracefully away down out of the edge of the forest toward the Indian village.

Old Anaconda gazed after her until she had disappeared within the gates. Then turned back further into the forest, and made a careful examination of his weapons, to see that they were in condition.

He then crept forward again to the edge of the timber, and throwing himself upon the leaves, dozed away the time in the sunlight. For he was in no particular hurry to make his venture in the Sioux village, during the broad light of day.

He waited all day long in the edge of the forest, without the least visible impatience. Indeed he had many a time lain in wait the better share of twenty-four hours in order to entrap a savage.

During the day several delegations of savages, numbering from ten to twenty in each, approached and entered the village, but Sitting Bull was not among them.

Anaconda noted this fact, with contracting brows. "More deviltry brewing, somewhere, I'll bet," he muttered. "Et don't matter so much, now, fer thar war none o' ther settlers hyarabouts as war wuth sculpin', 'cept Tom Owens. Poor feller, et war a shame about him. Them 'ar settlers at Quinnebog ar' nothin' but pirates anyhow, o' which thet Canada Chet ar' a fair sample."

At last the sun set, and the shadows grew thick in the prairie, below the wood line.

The sky had clouded over and there would be no moon, which made it all the more satisfactory to the scout, as he could work with less fear of detection.

The camp-fire light from the village reflected against the heavens with wonderful distinctness, and the noise that floated up on the evening breeze from there bespoke the fact that the Indians were wide awake over some discovery.

The scout's curiosity was aroused, but he made no venture toward the spot, for he knew that to betray his presence in the neighborhood would only be the means of stimulating the watchfulness of the camp. He therefore lay quietly in the edge of the timber, and waited until he should find the camp silent enough for his purpose.

During this delay he heard a footstep in his rear, and turned to behold one whom he least expected—Hazel Eye. She came forward, carrying her handsome rifle in her hand, and nodded as the scout saluted.

"Great Lamentations! Is that you, Forest Lil? I didn't expect to see ye way up heer," the dwarf scout said, as he arose and shook her hand. "How's things in Quinnebog, anyhow?"

"Bad," Hazel Eye said, shaking her head. "Canada Chet has taken two more prisoners, and put them in the pen."

Anaconda scowled.

"Thet Canadian hez about run ther length o' his rope," he muttered. "Who are these chaps as has got shut up in the pen?"

"Two young adventurers, who came into this section for the purpose of hunting and trapping. Their names are Hal Dayton and Dave Laam."

"Well, we'll have to see to their cases d'rectly. At present, however, I have another case on the docket."

"You are not going to make an attempt to enter the Indian village?"

"I am thet same, you bet! Thar's two gals thar—old Owens's gal, Milly, an' another 'un, called Rachel. I'm goin' ter resky 'em."

"Rachel!" Hazel Eye gasped, excitedly. "Whom do you mean—Rachel Connors?"

"Ken't say as ther thet. Wild Bird didn't give no other name than Rachel, I reckon."

"Wild Bird? When did you see her?"

"This morning. Do you know her?"

"Yes; I have often met her in the woodland. She is a beautiful young woman, Anaconda, and as good as she is beautiful."

"Them's just my ideas. An' when she becomes Mrs. Anaconda, gal, I shall expect thet ye will come an' see us, in our new home."

"What! you don't mean to say that you are going to make this Wild Bird your wife, do you?"

"The Lord permittin', an' et don't rain, hem's my concide intentions, Hazel Eye. She wants a white husband, an' hayr's w'at ain't goin' ter pass her by."

"Then, let me congratulate you, my dear friend, for if you get Wild Bird, you not only get the most beautiful woman in the North-west, but you also get a faithful and loving-hearted girl. But this Rache—did you ever see her, Anaconda?"

"No, never. What about her?"

"She is the wife of Canada Chet—a beautiful, prepossessing girl, whom the ruffian married in the East and then discarded. She came to my grandfather's cabin, one night, and we sheltered her, and she told us her pitiful story. We tried to urge her to remain with us, but she would not, and the next morning departed into the forest, since when I have searched for her every day, but in vain."

"Waal, I reckon ther gal in Sitting Bull's camp aire ther same one. I shell hev ter bid you good-by, now, as it is time for me to get down there."

"Ain't you afraid to make so dangerous a venture?"

"Nary. I've been in wuss hoels 'n that, in my time. Besides, my Wild Bird ar' goin' ter lend me a hand."

"Well, be careful. Where will you take the rescued girls?"

"To my fort in the woods. You know where that is?"

"Yes. I will come there, by and by."

Then the Forest Lily turned back into the depths of the wood.

It was now bordering on the midnight hour. The Indian village had quieted down, and the camp-fires burned low.

The clouds overhead were more broken, drifting about in banks, now hiding the moon, then again, allowing that orb to flood the earth with light.

"It's now fer me ter work," Anaconda muttered, strapping his rifle to his back, and preparing for his venture. "I'll either resky them g'ls, or give Wild Bird a chance to mourn over my sca'p."

Securing his revolvers, he prostrated himself, and crept away.

Away out of the timber, and down over the rolling prairie he went, at a snail's pace, pausing occasionally to listen and peer ahead. The darkness was dense, on account of the moon's sudden departure under a bank of cloud, and he counted it his safest plan to be sure that no danger lay in his path before he advanced.

At the end of an hour he arrived close to the gates, and found one of them a trifle ajar—just enough that only a sharp glance would have detected the fact!

On pressing his ear to the crack he could hear no sound, and waiting a few minutes longer, he pulled one open sufficient to admit of his passage through, and then closed it after him. Standing in the shadow of the great fence he gazed about upon the scene.

The lodges were ranged around the sides of the inclosure, the nearest one to Anaconda being only a few feet distant. In the center was an open space where the horses were corraled and the camp-fires were built.

The laps of the lodges were all down now, and the village had the appearance of being quite deserted, but for the horses in the corral.

"They're all asleep," the scout muttered. "Now I must find out where the girls are."

"Not all asleep," exclaimed a low, musical voice, in an undertone, as a plump pair of arms were thrown about Anaconda's neck, and he was kissed upon the forehead. "The Wild Bird could not sleep for gladness. Has the white hunter come to take her to his wigwam?"

"Yes; them's my intentions," the Destroyer replied. "But thar's a couple of others I must take along."

"Yes; Wild Bird has not forgotten. She has told her sisters, and prepared them for the great scout's coming."

"Bully for you!" and Anaconda took the beautiful Indian's hand and pressed it warmly. "You're a trump, an' I'm proud o' ye. But where is Sitting Bull that he didn't come into the village?"

"Sitting Bull is abroad in the great forest. Some evil project is in his mind that none can solve. He has set an eye upon the Forest Lily, Hazel Eye, and Wild Bird thinks he is watching for her."

"Waal, now, when he ketches the gal sleepin' when danger's brewin', he's welcome to her," Anaconda muttered, with a chuckle.

"She's purty nigh a good 'un, an' thet Hazel Eye. But fer beauty, she ken't hold a candle to the Wild Bird."

The Indian girl smiled up into his eyes, lovingly, for she believed that the scout meant every word he uttered. And who shall say that he did not?

"Whar ar' the guards?" he asked, peering cautiously around.

"They drank of whisky furnished by Wild Bird, and sleep deep," the Indian beauty replied, smiling. "Anaconda need have no fear of them, but must work cautiously lest he arouse those in the lodges."

"Where are the white girls?"

Wild Bird pointed across the square to a small lodge.

"The Destroyer will find them there, in readiness. While he goes for them, Wild Bird will bring her horses."

With this understanding they separated, Anaconda going silently across the village green to the lodge, and the graceful Wild Bird gliding toward the corral.

Hers was perhaps the most difficult part, for a

single whinny might arouse the whole camp, and all would be lost.

But she was a favorite with all the animals, and they were not frightened at her approach.

She was fortunate in securing her four pet animals, and leading them across to the gate, where she tied them, and again stole away. She was gone but a few moments, however, ere she returned with four saddles and bridles, which she soon had upon the horses.

In the meantime Old Anaconda had made his way across to the little lodge, and upon raising the flap he perceived that a faint light was burning inside.

"Come!" he said, in a low tone, although he could see no one, "all is ready, if you wish to escape."

Instantly two female figures wrapped in skin mantles, emerged from behind a partition, and he had the satisfaction of shaking hands with the two girls whom he had come to rescue.

But there was no time to lose, and bidding them follow him, he led the way across the plaza to where Wild Bird was waiting.

She was very much excited as the scout could see by the gleam of her eyes and she raised her hand enjoining silence.

"Listen!" she cried, and they did, and heard a long, peculiar cry, from out on the prairie.

"It is Sitting Bull!" she cried. "He is coming, and we are too late!"

CHAPTER X.

CASPER DAYTON PLOTS—AMASA IN THE WOODS.

A FEW HOURS previous to this, Sitting Bull had met in the forest no less an individual than Casper Dayton. The two had ridden into a glade nearly simultaneously, and drawn rein within a few feet of each other, with a pair of duplicate grunts, for it will be remembered that Dayton was attired in the costume of an Indian chief.

Sitting Bull was unaccompanied by his warriors, and the two men were quite alone in the heart of the northern forest.

"Ugh!" was the chief's interrogative grunt. "Who is the chief that is a stranger to Sitting Bull? What brings him into the forest that belongs to the Sioux nation?"

"Watsanoka is no Indian warrior by birth, but a pale-face hunter, who has come to the land of the Sioux to behold the great Sitting Bull. He brings the great chief important news, and would ask his aid."

"Sitting Bull's ears are open. Let the white renegade proceed," the chief said, haughtily. "He will answer after he has heard the words of the pale-face."

Casper Dayton was sure that he held the key of success in his hand; he meant to use it.

"To the south-west of us," he began, "lies the settlement of Quinnebog, or the Choppings. Does Sitting Bull know the secret of that town?"

"Sitting Bull knows naught of the settlers by Beaver Lake, except that they infringe upon his rights, by building themselves homes upon his hunting-grounds."

"Then lend me your attention, and I will tell you something of which you have probably never dreamed; you have probably heard of the 'Pen,' as it is called, where scores of men are supposed to be confined by the border ruffian, Canada Chet. No one else ever enters inside the walls of the 'Pen'; all wonder, but do not know what use these men are put to, or what mystery envelops the place. Has Sitting Bull never guessed at the secrets thereof?"

"No; Sitting Bull has never guessed the secrets of the Pen. Does his white brother know the secrets?"

"Like a book," the disguised schemer replied, "and he has come to make a bargain with the great and noble Sitting Bull. Let the chief listen: there are two American youths in the Pen, whom I would possess. They have but recently come to the forest."

"Watsanoka cannot have them," Sitting Bull said, decidedly; "one of the pale-face youths has won the heart of Hazel Eye, the Forest Lily, and the great Sioux chief would have his scalp."

"But, hold up. There is much that Sitting Bull would rather have—something he prizes more than scalps, women or horses. If Sitting Bull will promise that the white boys shall be Watsanoka's, he will tell the great chief a strange secret."

"Sitting Bull will hear first, and promise afterward," the chief replied, craftily.

Casper Dayton reflected a moment. He was not sure whether it was best to trust the red-skin or not.

"I will tell you," he said, after a while, "if you will promise to give me up the boys, and a girl named Milly Owen, should the news prove valuable and interesting to you!"

"Sitting Bull agrees to that. Let the pale-face speak."

"Well, then, here is the secret. The Pen, at the Choppings, is a counterfeiters' den, where spurious coin and paper money are manufactured in large quantities."

"Money heap no good," Sitting Bull said. "No buy blankets an' powder."

"Yes it will! Now, I'll tell you what I'll do. You have many warriors. Go you and kill off this Canada Chet and his gang, together with the lumbermen of Quinnebog, and we'll go in partners, in this counterfeiting biz. I'll run it, you see, and give you half of the good money that is realized from the sales of the spurious. See?"

"Sitting Bull is not blind. It shall be as Watsanoka says, for he is a great rogue. He shall have the trapper's daughter whom Sitting Bull has in his wigwam."

"And the boys?"

"And the boys."

"Good! Sitting Bull is a great, noble and wise chief, and he shall have paper dollars with which to light his pipe. Let him set his warriors at once on the war-path with the instruction to kill and scalp every man in Quinnebog, or in the forest, except the youths, and the trapper's daughter. Let Sitting Bull also give Watsanoka a token to wear in plain view, that he may not be molested."

"Watsanoka shall not be harmed," Sitting Bull said. "The great chief will caution his warriors. Every pale-face but the young Americans, the trapper's daughter, and Hazel Eye, shall meet death at the hands of the Sioux. Sitting Bull has spoken!"

"And spoken wisely. But, hold! Ought we not leave the pale-face slaves in the pen unmolested? They understand the manufacture of this money better than we, an' can be forced to work for the firm of Sitting Bull and Watsanoka the same as the Canada Chet."

"Watsanoka speaks wisely, and it shall be as he says. Sitting Bull will at once proceed to his village and dig up the hatchet and put it in the hands of his warriors. Will Watsanoka come to the village with Sitting Bull?"

"Not now, noble chief, as I have work elsewhere. Sitting Bull may keep the trapper's daughter in his wigwam until the war is over, when Watsanoka will take her for his wife."

"How does Watsanoka know the trapper's daughter if he is a stranger in the north?"

"Easily answered. A year ago the Owens lived in Minnesota, and Watsanoka also lived nigh. He wooed the pale-face girl, but she refused him, and he swore to one day possess her. That day is near."

The twain separated, Sitting Bull riding through the forest toward his village, and Casper Dayton taking a course nearly opposite.

The schemer was overjoyed at his success in enlisting Sitting Bull in his plans, and smiled triumphantly as he rode along.

"Everything is working in my favor as nice as I could ask for," he muttered, with a dark glitter in his eyes. "By the time my beloved brother James arrives upon the scene, I shall have the forest full of roving Sioux, and if he falls by a tap from a tomahawk it's none of my fault—of course it's not. And the boy, Harold, I'll see that he is properly cared for. Then, Brookfield Place and the Dayton inheritance are mine!"

It was a grand scheme which he had been maturing for years, but without knowing how to put it into execution. But now his course seemed plain. With so powerful an ally as Sitting Bull, he would triumph; at least he could see no reason why he should not.

"Lordy! Jerusalem! Jewhitaker Jewsharp! I wish I was back in Kalamazoo, I do, god darn my foolish soul! Why did I ever leave Sally ter cum out hayr, whar injines an' wild beasts ar' thicker'n hair on a dorg? Oh! oh!"

The speaker was Amasa Scroggs, of course, in difficulty, as usual. He had been wandering aimlessly about through the forest in search of something to appease his appetite, when there had come a whirl and an arrow scratched the "crazy-bone" of his right elbow. Amasa had made one of his lightning leaps which carried him behind the protective body of an upturned tree, where he crouched and gave vent to his howl of misery.

"Oh! Gosh-all-fish-hooks!" he gasped, peering around in the blackness of the night; "thar's a hull caboodle of them durned rips over thar, an' they're after my scalp. Ugh! I wish I was back in Kalamazoo! What a fool I was ter ever cum out hayr a huntin' after a couple o' runaway boys, jest fer two dollars a day! Hain't see'd hide ner ha'r o' a boy yet, nuther. Lordy! I'm as nervous as a cat's tail when she sees a rat. Expect to see an Injun every blessed minnit. Ugh! this is ther awfullest country I ever got inter. Last night I ran ten miles ter get away from that consarned Walkin' Head, an' now I'm cornered by Injuns. Oh! I want ter go hum."

Rising to his feet he peered around the stump, expecting to behold an Indian.

The next instant a horrified yell pealed from his lips, for there, not three yards away, was the terrible Walking Head advancing toward him, the mouth stretched from ear to ear in a horrible grin, and the tongue lolling out in a hideous manner.

Poor Amasa!

His blood froze in his veins, and his limbs refused to move. His hair was fairly "upon end." A more seriously frightened man probably never existed. He could only stand and gaze at the strange object in a sort of horrible fascination.

It came nearer and nearer, until it stood before him, its whole height but reaching to his knees. It was to all appearances simply a human head grown upon a huge pair of feet, the body having been omitted in the make-up. Upon the face there was that demonic smile, phosphorescent-like, and the ears several sizes too large for the head, flapped to and fro in a startling manner. Altogether it was a monstrosity of the most fearful nature, and it must have put to flight the courage and nerve of stronger men than Amasa Scroggs.

It stopped before the horror-struck Yankee, and gazed up into his face, one eye rolling and blinking viciously.

"Be not afraid!" came the words, in a sepulchral voice. "The Demon of the Forest harms not the weak and timid. Come! follow me, for there are many savages after your scalp. They fear me, and will not molest you if you come with me!"

"Oh! Lordy! Jerusalem! I'd rather be scalped, than go wi' you!" Amasa gasped, with a shiver. "Oh! say, please run off, little feller, won't ye? I never hurt you—I—"

"Fear not," again spoke the sepulchral voice.

"The spirit of the dead can do you no harm. It is the living that are your foes, and they are all around you."

"Then, d'y'e mean ter say ye ain't livin'?" Amasa gasped, his hair feeling light enough to fly from his head.

"Only in spirit exists the Demon of the Forest!" was the comforting assurance. "I am but a living spirit—I am but the air you breathe. The shape you behold is but your over-wrought imagination. Touch me, and you will find that I am composed of—nothing!"

"Oh! Jerusalem! no; I wouldn't touch you for ten dollars. Oh! Lordy, go away—go—away!"

"You must come with me, and as soon as I get you out of the reach of the Indians, I will bid you adieu."

"Fer honest, neow?"

"Certainly. Come!"

"Waal, hang me ef I won't."

The Walking Head with a low laugh led the way—waddling off into the forest.

Amasa followed, but at a respectful distance, for he still held the Demon of the Forest in mortal dread.

Through the blackness of the night, they went, the Walking Head in advance.

But, suddenly, Amasa gazed around him in perplexity. The Dwarf Demon had suddenly disappeared! Nowhere was he to be seen, and Scroggs was again lost in the great woods.

"Oh! Jewhittaker! I wish I was back with Sally—I do, fer true. I never will git out of this consarned region, I—Hello!"

While he was complaining he had suddenly struck what appeared to be a well-beaten trail, leading at right angles to the course he was pursuing, or in other words, north and south.

"I guess I'll pursue this course," he muttered, grasping his rifle firmly, and gliding along. "Hope I don't stumble on that Walking Head again!"

He had not proceeded twenty rods, ere a big painted savage suddenly bounced before him, with upraised tomahawk.

It was desperation, now, more than courage, which nerved the stalwart son of Michigan, and caused him to sling his rifle suddenly around and knock the red-skin quickly to the ground.

It was all done in an instant, and then he kept on, looking on every side for more of the painted imps; but no more bothered him, nor did he catch a glimpse of another.

About daydawn he came suddenly to a halt, on the margin of a small clearing, for looming up, therein, was a commodious cabin, built of half-hewn logs, and painted red!

CHAPTER XI.

ESCAPING—FROM TREE TO TREE—THE NEW FOE.

We must now return to "the Pen," and its surroundings.

Early in the morning after their arrival, at night, just as they were about going to sleep, Hal and Dave were disturbed by strange noises, which they could not account for—noises that sounded like human screams of agony, in the distance.

But these sounds soon were heard no more, and both being really fatigued, needed no urging to seek forgetfulness and rest.

They slept soundly and awoke after a long while, feeling refreshed. Alex Watchman, Harry Reynolds, and several others were up and about, already, while some still lingered in bed.

During the interval of their slumber the tables had been replenished with milk and corn-cake, familiarly known as "Johnny-cake."

"What time is it?" Hal Dayton asked, sitting up, and giving his eyes an initiatory rub toward ceiling.

"Nearly six o'clock at night," the old man replied. "You'd better put down some provender, now, as there's no telling when Le Garo may come for us."

"Where's a fellow's clothing?" grunted Dave Laam. "Ain't he goin' to have nothing to wear?"

The old man laughed.

"I reckon not, young man, unless, perchance, you are more favored than the rest of us. I have not worn a shred of clothing except a loin-cloth in the whole time of my incarceration here."

"What is the object of this?"

"You have asked me more than I can tell."

Dave and Hal partook of their corn-bread and milk with relish, and were then ready for work.

Some of the slaves arose grumblingly, others cheerful.

"Did you see anything, as you came through the woods, of a young maiden on horseback?" Harry Reynolds asked, in a low tone, of the two adventurers.

"If you mean the pretty one calling herself Hazel Eye, we did. Why, what of her?"

"Well—well, you see—" and here the prisoner stopped short and blushed.

"Yes, I think I can see!" Dave answered, with a smile. "You're in love with the forest beauty, head-over-heels!"

"I acknowledge the corn," Reynolds replied, a sparkle in his eyes. "Do you think me to blame for it? Is she not a queer and pretty plant to be found growing in the somber shades of the wild North?"

"You are not a bit to blame—that is, if she reciprocates," replied Hal. "I almost fancy I could bear up under such a delightful responsibility myself."

"She no doubt believes me either dead or faithless by this time, as it was before I was shut up here that I met her in the woods, and we formed an attachment for each other."

"What brought you into this particular section?"

"The prospect of trapping the beaver, which are said to exist in large numbers hereabouts."

By this time Le Garo appeared upon the scene, armed with his terrible whip, and looking more brutal and savage than before.

The slaves, Dave and Hal included, filed out in single file into the counterfeiting room, while the others, who had just quit work, filed into the sleeping-room.

That was a dreary night tour for Dave and Hal. Neither had ever been used to hard labor before, and it was no play to run the two heavy machines for twelve hours.

But they worked steadily and faithfully, and were fortunate in not experiencing the sting of Le Garo's lash with which he occasionally cut the lagging or tricky.

Our two adventurers, however, learned the science of counterfeiting, and profited thereby.

The coins were manufactured of lead, zinc, copper and silver, the cost of a dollar, after it was finished, being about twenty cents, so that the profits of the "queer" was about 80 per cent.

The cost of the manufacture of the paper money was, of course, far less, as the whole token of the work was engraved upon steel, even to the signature. The paper and ink, therefore, were the only expense, as the labor cost nothing.

More care had to be exercised in the printing of the bills, however, than in the coins, to bring the proof to a high state of perfection.

Many hundred could have been run through the machine in one day, but they would have been too imperfect to put upon the market.

Most of the hands were engaged in working upon the metal, as it required but Hal, Alex, Watchman, and a paper-sizer to manipulate the steel-plate printing.

The hours would never hurry. Hal and Dave were both fatigued greatly, and hungry, in the bargain. But there was no hope of relaxation from their labors, until the morning dawned again.

It came, at last, and they were replaced by the fresh gang, and marched back to the eating and sleeping-room, where they were locked in like a band of convicts.

"I'm getting confounded tired of this," Big-foot Dave growled, when he, Hal, Harry Reynolds, and Alex Watchman were again seated at the repast of corn-cake and milk. "I'm going to make an attempt at escape. If the rest will go in with me, I've every confidence that we can break away and reach the woods without trouble. What do you say, friend Watchman?"

The old man shook his head.

"It's vain to hope for such a blessing," he replied, sadly. "Why, young man, have not a hundred attempts been made, and all failed?"

"Hang the odds!" Big Track replied. "I've made up my mind not to do another day's work in this counterfeiter's den, and I'll be hanged if I will! If any man in this room has enough desire to escape, that he will assist me, let him step forward. Those who fear the consequences of a failure, can keep still."

The slaves came forward to a man. No desire had they to remain in the pen, if there was a shadow of a chance for escape.

Dave sounded them all carefully, to see that there were no weak ones.

"I'll tell you how I'm going to manage it," he said, glancing up toward the roof of the solid structure. "Those windows there are grated, but they won't be so very long, if there is enough of you to boost me up and hold me there."

There were enough, and he prepared at once for his venture for their liberty.

Taking two of the knives which were brought in with their meals, he carefully hacked nicks into their edges, thereby making tolerable saws out of them.

He then mounted upon one of the tables, and was lifted up by several pairs of ready hands, and held there.

He now discovered that the act of removing the iron bars was easier than he had at first supposed as they were only fastened to the wood with screws. These he soon had out, and the bars were removed; after which to displace the glass window was but the work of a moment, and a stream of the fresh air of the outer world rushed in.

By placing the table upon which he stood on top of another table, and raising both to either, his companions were enabled to raise him so that he could look out of the hole upon the roof.

All he could see was the tops of the trees, and a sparkle of water upon the lake. The sun was shining brightly, and the birds were caroling their early morning songs among the wilderness of variegated foliage, that spread out beautifully before the naked eye.

From afar off in the forest came wild, discordant sounds, which boded no good to the town of Quinnebog.

They were Indian war-cries.

Springing upward, and drawing himself outside upon the roof, Dave Laam looked around him for some means with which to rescue his companions.

Fortune seemed to favor him in directing his attention to a matting of wild grape-vines which had twisted into a natural rope up over the roof, from the ground, and into the trees above.

Creeping down to the edge of the roof, he severed these vines, and dragged the loosened end back to the hole and dropped it through into the room below.

He then held fast to the upper portion, until one by one every man had ascended to the roof, where they stood, in the blast that swept across from the lake.

"The next question is, what shall we do?" said Hal, gazing about, and listening, with the others, to the sounds, which came from off in the forest,

"Can't we somehow get possession of our clothing and weapons?"

"No! that is impossible," Alex Watchman said, promptly.

"We ought to fervently thank God that we have been permitted, through the heroism of our brave comrade here, to escape from the living tomb at all. To be sure it isn't a very desirable plight to be in, this being ungarbed, but it is a blessing compared to that imprisonment. If we can but get away from the vicinity of the Pen, unobserved, I know of the cabin of an old scout, in the forest, where we can find skins to cover our nakedness. But we run a great risk of discovery by descending to the ground. Besides the forest is full of Sioux, judging from the yells we hear."

"I do not intend to descend to the ground," Big Track Dave said, decidedly. "You observe how matted together are the branches of the nearest trees? We must make our escape from tree to tree, which I think we can do, if we work carefully. Once well away from 'the Pen' we can descend to the ground and make off with our best speed."

"Is there no hope for rescuing the others who are in the Pen?" asked Harry Reynolds, anxiously.

"Not at present," Watchman replied. "We must look after No. 1 first; then remember No. 2."

Dave Laam's plan being accepted they accordingly proceeded to put it into execution.

Big Track led off, followed in turn by Hal, Harry, Watchman and the others. The branches of a large tree swept the cabin on the western side, and they crept carefully into this, one by one, and then on over intersecting branches from tree to tree.

Considerable noise was made, cautious as they were, but fortune favored them inasmuch as their departure had been wholly unnoticed. Meanwhile, the yells of the Indians came nearer and louder.

"The durned red cusses must be chasing somebody," Dave declared, as, with his companions, he paused to listen. "I guess it won't be healthy for us to descend to *terra firma*, yet awhile. What's your opinion, friend Watchman?"

"You are undoubtedly right," the old man said. "It is safer to remain under cover at present."

After occasional advances and halts they found themselves among the branches of a gigantic oak, where they were quite secure. While all hands were talking over the situation, Hal Dayton and Harry Reynolds ascended into the extreme top of the tree, to make observations.

A strong east wind had sprung up, and what they saw was not in the least encouraging.

The horizon was hidden by a dense smoke-cloud, and great volumes of smoke and burning leaves were streaming up out of the forest, in nearly all points of the compass.

The woods certainly were on fire. The savages, evidently had kindled the fires to roast out the village and consume their fiendish work.

"We shall have to dust out of this, mighty lively, if we don't want our bacon roasted," Hal said, and the two boys slid down hastily to where the others were perched, and apprised them of their discovery.

"There is no use of sticking to the trees any longer," Dave said, gloomily. "We've got to get down to *terra firma*, and peg out as fast as our legs can carry us. How far are we from the cabin you mentioned, Watchman?"

"About three miles, I think. It must lie somewhere to the north-west of us, I should say."

They hastily descended from the tree, and set off at a swift trot, Watchman and Dave in advance. The leaves and stubs hurt their feet, and the briars and bushes tore their flesh, but they kept bravely on, knowing that they were now fleeing from an enemy even more remorseless and merciless than the savage prowler of the forest.

Suddenly they burst out into an opening where a fire was burning, and before they could retreat, a wild triumphant war-whoop burst upon their hearing.

CHAPTER XII.

A CUT AND RUN DASH—GOING TO ROOST.

The words of Wild Bird struck upon the ears of her auditors with a despairing jar—all except upon Old Anaconda. The old man set his teeth with a fierce click, and he hastily lifted Milly and Rachel Connors into the saddle.

"Nothing must stop us now!" he said, in a husky tone. "Mount, Wild Bird, and when I throw the gates open, ride out upon the prairie, and head to the north. I will be with you, ere long. Sitting Bull is yet some distance away, I judge!"

"But his cries will arouse the braves in the village!" Wild Bird said, trembling.

"So much the worse for us," Anaconda replied. "Now then, git ready."

Wild Bird vaulted lightly to the back of her horse, and took the connecting straps which guided the other animals.

"Ready!" she said; then Old Anaconda threw open the gates and leaped like a rocket into the saddle allotted to him.

"Now!" he gritted, "let 'em scoot!"

He kept the bridle-strap of the horse rode by Milly Owen, while Wild Bird did the same for her charge. And away they dashed at a tremendous speed, over the dun prairie to the south-west.

At the moment of leaving the village the dusk had been dense, which was favorable to their escape. But such good fortune was not to be theirs, and in the next few minutes a bank of clouds soon floated away from the path of the moon, and a flood of mellow light suffused all the landscape in a sheen of silver glory.

An instantaneous shout came from the south, and Anaconda glanced about to see a band numbering

some thirty Indians, coming after them, in hot pursuit.

"It is Sitting Bull and his warriors, too!" Wild Bird said. "They are picked braves, and well mounted."

"Consequently, our only crop is ter git up an' git!" the Destroyer replied, urging on the animals to a lively gallop. "If we ken but get inter ther woods, old Sittin' Bull can kiss my big toe. Spur up yer hoss, Wild Bird—whoopee! I tell you we don't ask no odds o' ther hull Sioux nation."

It was by this exhibition of hilarity that the scout endeavored to distract the girls' thoughts from the danger that menaced them, for he was well aware that danger did spur at their heels—danger, which, ten to one, they could not eventually escape.

But they made a desperate struggle for it. Wild Bird had not belied the powers of her horses; they were easy riders, and as swift as any on the prairies. When urged down to their bottom speed, they could go like to a lightning-express.

By the course adopted by the Dwarf Destroyer, it was a good three miles to the edge of the timber. But he chose this route in preference to all others, for the reason that the prairie was nearly level, and then it was the nearest direct line to his cabin.

On—on, over the yielding turf, sped the pursued and pursuers. It was a race for life on the part of the fugitives, and a race for scalps on the part of the foe. To add to the strength of the latter, the moonlight revealed that the whole male population of the Indian village was turning out upon horseback, and joining in the chase.

"Durn myself for an uneducated mule!" Anaconda growled, when he made this discovery. "Ef I hedn't orter be kicked from San Francisco ter New York, I don't want a cent! A reg'lar cussed old numb-skull am I—a ginnyswine no-brained sucker!"

"What is it that makes the White Destroyer reproach himself?" Wild Bird asked, anxiously.

"Oh! nuthin' much, only, why didn't I stampeed them hosses in ther Injun village, 'stid o' leavin' 'em fer ther red ripe-calleons to ride? Oh, fire away, yer red sons o' carmine! but ye ken't do us any harm 3/4."

"The Sioux are very angry," the Indian girl said. "If they should catch Wild Bird, they would put her to death. But she would laugh!"

"That's it, little gal! Don't let them varmints skeer ye fer a cent—not one red identical cent! You're my meat, I reckon, an' when them Sioux sons o' guns git their paws on ye, it'll be when Old Anaconda hes passed in his checks and balanced his books, you bet! Well, are you tired, Miss Owen?"

"Not very," the trapper's daughter replied. "Do you think there is great danger of their overtaking us?"

"Waal, neow, I shouldn't keer to express a candid opynun on that subject, bein's one ken't tell one minnit whar he'll be ther next," the dwarf replied, evasively. "Our only hope's ter press on an' get ter timber. Once we get thar, I'll opine ther old man knows a few things himself, once in a great while."

On—on—on they dashed, the yells of the pursuing Indians making the night hideous. They also kept up a continual fire with their repeating rifles, which, of course, did no harm to the fugitives, as they were a safe distance beyond the reach of the leaden messengers.

"Oh, plug away, blast ye!" the old scout grunted. "I'll bet ef ye claw my sculp this yere moon, et will be sumthin' ruther sing'lar. But, thar's no use mistakin'—them Injuns ar' crawlin' up on us, inch by inch!"

The jetty eyes of Wild Bird fired up instantly, as she heard the words.

The words of the Great Destroyer are not well spoken!" she cried, proudly. "Sittin' Bull has no horse in his corral that can keep pace with those of the Wild Bird. To show the hunter that Wild Bird knows, she will lead and they can follow."

And, as she ceased speaking, she uttered a wild, strange cry that echoed and re-echoed over the prairie; that was caught up in the distant aisles of the forest, and sped along in a peculiar bird-like call, until it finally died out altogether.

The animals ridden by the fugitives seemed to start and tremble for a single moment; then Wild Bird's horse shot away like an arrow, to be followed closely by the others.

A volley of bullets and a baffled yell of rage came from the pursuing red-skins; an answer, in the shape of a clear, defiant laugh, burst from the lips of Wild Bird.

"Jumpin' John Rogers!" Old Anaconda ejaculated, as he was borne along. "These yere are beauties, these animals! S'pose ye wouldn't sell one o' 'em fer a million, Wild Bird?"

"All that is Wild Bird's belongs to the great White Destroyer, as soon as he takes her for his bride."

"Phew! that's so, ain't it?" Anaconda muttered, scratching his head. "I'd e'en a'most forgot all about that fact."

"Must not forget now," Wild Bird said, in a significant tone. "Dwarf Destroyer must not forget his promise—must not think to deceive the Indian girl. She trusts him; if he gets treacherous like the snake his name resembles, then Wild Bird will die."

"Oh, ye needn't git at all skittish, my beauty, fer I'll hitch myself in double harness with you, ef I don't lose my ha'r an' kin find a parson. I'm yours tighter'n bark, until death do us part!"

This assurance seemed to set Wild Bird's doubts at rest, and a light of love once more shone out from her eyes.

And so the wild ride continued.

Now that a new speed had been brought out of the fugitives' animals, it was an easy job to keep out of

rifle-shot of the pursuers, and at last when they struck into the edge of the forest, the savages were a quarter of a mile or more away.

"Now, then, we'll puzzle 'em!" Old Anaconda said, with a chuckle, as he took the lead. "Foller behind me close, now, in single file, an' we'll see ef we can't git them off ther track, purty much!"

He accordingly struck off, with Milly Owens and Rachel Connors following respectively behind him, and Wild Bird bringing up the rear.

It was a long monotonous ride, with only the footfalls of the horses, and the occasional scream of a night bird to break the dead of nature's repose.

The woods were full of lurking shadows, that served to keep the two white girls in a constant state of terror, lest they should suddenly dissolve into a band of murderous savages.

Wild Bird was not alarmed, for she was literally a child of the forest; and Old Anaconda was equally at home there.

At last morning dawned, and the birds renewed their sweet songs among the branches of the forest monarchs.

Then it was that the Dwarf Destroyer ordered a halt. Wild Bird and the two white girls noticed a strange expression upon the scout's face, which was not usually there.

"What is it?" the Wild Bird demanded, anxiously. "Why does the Destroyer look around so?"

"Dunno, Birdie, jest now; but I reckon we'd better camp down hayr a trifle, w'ile I make a sorter reconnaissance. Sumhow my old bones predict Injuns!"

"Great Heaven! I hope your bones may belle you!" Rachel Connors said, in alarm. "Do you think the savages are in the neighborhood?"

"Can tell ye better after a bit," the Dwarf Scout said, sliding from the saddle. "You remain here, and do not dismount under any consideration, until I return, unless you hear the yell of a Comanche, then turn sharp to your right, and ride for your life."

With these injunctions, he unsu g his rifle, and stole cautiously away into the wood, leaving his horse in charge of Wild Bird.

He proceeded in a straight line due east from where he had left the females; then stopped stock-still in his tracks. He had no occasion to go further. The news for which he sought was within eye reach.

Ahead of him he could see the forms of several Indians, skulking about among the trees, as if searching for somebody.

They did not see him however, and he crept back in the direction whence he had come; then proceeded to make a great circle about the spot where he had left the girls. As a result, he found Indians skulking among the trees, forming a circle around the spot of forest containing Old Anaconda and his trio of charges.

This was the very state of affairs the old man had expected, and he was none disappointed by the discovery. He knew that it meant busine; that only fighting them with stealth would do any good.

Then, he returned to where he had left the girls. They were in a state of great anxiety.

"Indians!" he said, in answer to their inquiring looks. "We are literally surrounded on all sides."

"Oh! what shall we do?" Milly Owen murmured, tears springing into her eyes. "We shall all be massacred!"

Poor girl! she had witnessed the horrible butchery of her own parents but a few hours before, and the scene now arose before her eyes in all its sickening details.

"No, we ain't goin' ter git massacred—nuthin' o' ther sort, ef ther old court ar' on duty. I'll all w et ain't no mite of a deefkilty, but we've got ter beat ther cusses, somehow."

"Did the Destroyer see Sittin' Bull?" Wild Bird asked.

"No! ther durned old skeeslyx kept out o' my sight, or I shed hev put a bullet thru his kernoodleum. Just keep still now, while I think."

And standing with his face to the east, the scout ruminated over the situation.

"Thar's only one plan, an' we've got ter grab it like a fish grabs bait!" he said, at last. "Do you think you could send the horses away riderless, Wild Bird?"

"The animals of Wild Bird are trained to do her bidding," the beautiful Indian girl replied, proudly.

"Good! Our hope may then be a hope. Come! foller me!"

And vaulting into his saddle the scout rode on through the woods. The three girls followed, wonderingly, but asked no questions.

By his directions they lingered behind, allowing him to get some distance ahead.

Suddenly he arose in his stirrups, and clenched his hands to the limbs of a giant linden tree beneath which he was passing. The next instant he had drawn himself up, and his horse passed on. He then motioned the three girls to ride beneath the tree, and reach up their arms to him.

In this manner he succeeded in pulling them all up into the great tree.

"Now, send the animals away," he said, when he had landed them all safely. "They must not remain in the neighborhood to betray us."

Wild Bird bowed, and spoke quickly and excitedly to the animals, in the Indian tongue. They pricked up their ears at the sound of her voice; then the pony she had ridden gave a wild snort, and dashed on through the forest, followed by the others.

Then the dusky beauty turned to Old Anaconda, a sparkle of triumph in her midnight eyes.

"Could the lover of Wild Bird do so much?" she demanded, eagerly.

"Waal, now, I shed rather opine not," the dwarf replied, smiling. "But, whar'll them ar' animals go to, anyhow?"

"To the silent stream that runs through the forest," Wild Bird replied. "They will wait there for me to join them. They have done so, many times, when Wild Bird hunted the deer afoot."

"Waal, ye've got good control over 'em, I'll sw'ar. Ef ye make yer futer husband toe the scratch like thet, I allow ye'll hev a purty fine job on yer hands," and his laugh was music to her ears.

"Wild Bird will be White Destroyer's slave. She work for him—mind him," was the artless reply of the beautiful Indian.

They had remained in the tree but a couple of hours, when the scout again manifested uneasiness.

CHAPTER XIII.

BREAKING THE CORDON—SITTING BULL IN TOILS—A RENEGADE'S SURPRISE.

WILD BIRD was the first to notice it, and she touched him upon the arm.

"What is it that again disturbs the White Destroyer?" she asked, anxiously, for now loving the honest scout with all the strength of her passionate Indian nature, she naturally was much concerned to see him uneasy.

"Nuthin' much, yet," he replied; "by-an'-by things may assume a more sartin shape."

An hour passed, but there was no change. The woodland was just as solemn and silent as before; the birds chattered among the branches; the leaves dropped, dropped, dropped, at the touch of the breeze as it fanned through the forest.

Toward noon it stiffened up, and blew with greater force, causing the autumn foliage to descend in showers.

Old Anaconda broke the deep silence now by a suggestive grunt, and sniffed the air like a foxhound.

"Ther devil's ter pay," he growled; "ther woods ar' afire, an' we've got ter cavort out o' this roost or git scorched; you hear ther old man talk!"

"Have Sittin' Bull's braves done this cowardly work?" Wild Bird asked, her eyes flashing.

"Yas, I opine they hev, altho' et mayn't be ther same gang as ar' surroundin' us. Least how, ther fire ain't more'n a mile off, an' as it runs at the rate o' fifty miles a minnit, through these dry leaves, ther sooner we make a grand scoot, ther better; you hear me!"

To think with the Dwarf Destroyer, was to work. Taking off his belt, he lowered the girls to the ground by aid of it; then dropped lightly upon the leaves himself.

"Come!" he said, resolutely; "foller me, but don't ye dare ter make so much noise as a baby mouse. Ef strategy won't rescue us, knives and revolvers will, I reckon."

Softly they advanced through the forest, toward the west, Old Anaconda keeping a short distance ahead of the girls, to feel the way, while Wild Bird took the possession of a post as rear-guard.

Thus they moved along.

Danger lurked in their rear—danger lurked in front, in the shape of merciless red-men, whose only taste of pleasure was in braining or scalping the pale-faces.

The wind blew through the forest dense clouds of smoke and particles of burnt leaves, and warned the fugitives that the flames were not far behind.

Presently a wave of Old Anaconda's hand caused the girls to pause, while he skulked on, knife in hand; for the shining blade of steel was the only weapon to use now, as reports of firearms would only serve to attract the attention of the foe.

Like some grim phantom the little old scout glided along, no sound of his disturbing the silence. Every footstep was noiseless, his breath, even, was hushed—long-drawn.

In this way he crept on for perhaps an eighth of a mile, when he once more came to a halt, and stepped quickly behind a tree.

Just in time to escape observation, too, for an Indian came prowling along, glancing about him in a manner indicative that his suspicions had been aroused.

The eyes of the dwarf gleamed wickedly as he saw the unsuspecting brave approach, and he gripped his knife for its deadly work.

Nearer and nearer the red-skin came, in an incautious shuffling gait, until he had fairly passed the tree where the dwarf scout was concealed. Then a human body suddenly shot into the air and descended upon the back of the red-skin, and a keen, flashing blade did its deadly work. In a moment, Old Anaconda tore off the scalp.

"Wonder ef thar's any more as wants ter get registered fer election?" he muttered, peering around. "If so thar be, hayr's w'at kin accommy-date 'em at ther rate o' two a minit."

Resolved to know for certain if any more of the red devils blockaded the forest between him and liberty, he made a wider and deeper detour, but failed to find a foe. Satisfied on this score, he made his way back to where he had left the girls, and found them much alarmed at his protracted absence.

"You have killed an Indian," Milly Owen said, with a horrified glance at his belt.

"Yas; killed ther last of ther Mohicans, you bet! But look! yonder's a jet of flame! the fire is upon us! Come! we must put for our lives!"

And it was even so.

As they started to leave the spot, long tongues of fire followed spitefully in their wake, and dense clouds of choking smoke settled around them.

Sittin' Bull was in the vicinity of Quinebog with a part of his band, having detailed a number of his braves to worry and pursue the Dwarf Destroyer and his companions.

The great forest fire had swept far to the west

now, as the sun began to set, leaving in its track a desolate waste of scorched and naked timber, and frying carcasses of unfortunate beasts and birds that were caught in the fiery vortex.

In the edge of a timber that remained untouched by the fire, Sitting Bull and his handful of braves sat their horses like centaurs.

The Sioux chief was waiting for the white renegade, Watsanoka, previous to the proposed attack upon the Choppings.

But Watsanoka came not, and deep shadows once more began to gather in the forest, and the red-faced moon began to show her form up over the eastern horizon.

"Watsanoka is late!" Sitting Bull growled, at last. "The braves remain here while Sitting Bull go hunt him."

Death it meant for the braves to disobey, and so they kept their positions, while the old chief rode off.

Threading his way through the silent woods, he soon came to the northern bank of Beaver Lake. Without pausing, however, he continued along the bank toward the cabin of the Magician of the North, where he arrived in due time, and drew rein before the door.

All was dark and silent about the place, as if it were inhabited by people not earthly, if at all.

But Sitting Bull prides himself on possessing a brave heart, and he feared none of the evils reputed to exist in the cabin of the magician.

Therefore he dismounted and tried the door, and to his great surprise it swung open.

Before entering the cabin, the wily chief peered into it, to see that no trap had been set for him. But he could see nothing, and therefore stepped inside. Stirring the fire to a blaze, he proceeded to make an examination in general of the articles belonging to the magician.

Picking up a box which lay upon the floor, he raised the lid and gazed in. His curiosity was quite satisfied. A huge artificial snake lay in the bottom, and it instantly began to uncoil and raise its horrible head.

With a yell the chief dropped the box, and left the cabin, in disgust.

On arriving upon the outside, the savage found that his horse was missing. Thinking he might have strayed he set out in search of him, and spent full an hour in the task without success.

At last he paused at the edge of a glade, in a great rage.

"The pale-face dog of a magician is the thief, and Sitting Bull will have his revenge!" he grunted. "He will go and order his braves to kill every pale-face in the forest, be he friend or foe. None of the accursed race shall live in the land of the Sioux."

A low sound of laughter caused the chief to start, and gaze about him in alarm.

Not a half-dozen yards distant the terrible object known as the Demon of the Forest was approaching rapidly, the short feet moving as fast as those of a larger person.

The chief saw the strange and horrible thing, and stood rooted to the spot as if entranced. He had often heard of the Demon, but had never before caught more than a passing glimpse of it.

Nearer and nearer it came, the mouth opened by a broad grin; the eyes winking and blinking, and the ears wiggling and flapping like those of a mule.

Poor Sitting Bull! If he had never had experience of affright before, he had a good taste of it now. His limbs refused to move, and he trembled in every joint. All he could do was stand and stare at the terrible shape, in a horrible fascination.

The Walking Head seemed to be aware of this fact, for it approached the red-man, and walked around and around him, until Sitting Bull suddenly awakened to the fact that his lower limbs were wound and bound by a series of strong cords.

Instantly after this discovery he gave a gasp and reached to his belt for his tomahawk, but it was not there! Nor was he possessed of any of his weapons.

He was now quickly jerked to the ground, and his arms bound to his back, although he knew not how or by whom, as he lay prostrated upon his face.

When the tying was finished, he was rolled over on his back.

A savage "Ugh!" escaped him, for he beheld the terrible Walking Head standing by his side, and peering over into his face. The Sioux chief tried to speak, but his tongue seemed suddenly paralyzed.

An unearthly chuckle escaped the Demon of the Forest, as he watched the conflicting emotions upon the chief's face.

"Sitting Bull is a prisoner!" came words from the Walking Head, in a strange, sepulchral voice. "He is no longer the king of the forest, but lies before one many times smaller. The warriors of Sitting Bull are abroad with their hatchets unheeded. What would the Sioux do, in the land of the North?"

"Sitting Bull's men seek the branded pale-face who has no right in the land of the Sioux," was the sullen reply.

"Would not Sitting Bull recall his braves, and establish peace, if he could have his liberty again, at the hands of the Forest Demon?"

"No! Sitting Bull is no coward that he would accept terms of truce. He is not afraid to die, knowing that his braves will never leave the war-trail until the death of their chief has been amply avenged."

"Then Sitting Bull shall die, but not by the hand of the Forest Demon, for he is a being without hands. But Sitting Bull shall lie in the woods, and risk being devoured by wild beasts of prey. No warriors of the chief are in the neighborhood, and the chief of the Sioux can be alone with his thoughts!"

And with this comforting assurance, the Demon

of the Forest waddled away again across the glade whence he had come.

Sitting Bull was alone in the forest, where beasts of prey were not scarce, and his chances were any thing but tempting.

He did not, however, bemoan his situation in the least. He preserved that bull-dog stolidity peculiar to the Indian. Where some would have yelled to summon aid, he remained perfectly quiet.

He knew that there were men in the forest who might possibly answer his call—men such as the dread Anaconda, who would ask for no better opportunity to avenge old wrongs than the present, when the reputed greatest fighter of the Sioux nation lay upon his back, powerless as a new-born babe.

In the meantime, Casper Dayton in his Indian disguise had been prowling about in the vicinity of the Choppings, and had learned of the escape of Hal Dayton and Dave Laam, together with part of the press-gang who worked in the pen.

"Ten thousand curses upon their heads and souls!" the villain hissed, as he left the village and walked along the southern shore of the lake. "If I had burned that shell of a counterfeiting den, as I had a mind to, their hash would have been settled. Now, I must hunt them up. But, hold, I must not go too fast. I will send Sitting Bull to destroy the village and all that is in it. I shall then have full sway, as long as things hitch well with Sitting Bull. An Indian is treacherous, but I believe I can get along with the red Satan as well as if he were white, so long as I feed him well with money and promises."

Searching along the lake he soon found a canoe, and springing into it, he pulled across to a point where he had made an appointment to meet the Sioux chief and his braves.

On stepping ashore and entering the forest, he found the red-skins, but not their commander.

"Where is the great chief, Sitting Bull?" he asked, addressing one of the savages whom he had heard called Foxfoot, and who had assumed command for the time being.

"The great chief went in search of Watsanoka and has not returned," was the reply.

"I am Watsanoka," Casper Dayton said, "and your chief bade me to give you orders when it pleased me."

"The ears of Sitting Bull's braves are open, and they will heed the words of Watsanoka," Foxfoot replied.

"Then let them visit the pale-face settlement on the banks of Beaver Lake, and begin the scalp-dance of death. Let not a man, woman, or child be spared; let the firebrand be applied to every cabin, except the building called 'The Pen.' Does Foxfoot understand?"

The savage responded with a "Ugh!" and turned and addressed his companions in the Indian tongue.

Casper Dayton awaited the result with a great deal of satisfaction, for he saw that the savages were eager and willing, and he smiled his pleasure as they fled away through the forest, with drawn hatchets.

"I have won!" he said, distinctly and loud.

"No, Casper Dayton, you have lost!" exclaimed a voice, close behind him.

CHAPTER XIV.

FACE TO FACE—A CRIMSON CRIME.

THE speaker was the Forest Lily, Hazel Eye. She stood in the rear of Casper Dayton, a pistol in her hand which covered the renegade.

He wheeled and saw it—saw the marvelous beauty of the girl, who had assumed the attitude of enmity toward him. He ventured to utter an oath. What was there in her face that was familiar to him? What resemblance to some one in the past—?

"Devils seize you!" he gasped. "Who are you, and whom do you think me to be?"

"The eyes of the Forest Lily are rarely at fault," Hazel Eye replied, calmly. "They can penetrate the disguises of even greater villains than you, Casper Dayton, with all your hideous paint."

"Curse on you! What do you mean, girl? I am not Casper Dayton, nor did I ever hear the name."

"You need not lie," the girl replied, as coolly as before. "Come! Casper Dayton, or no Casper Dayton, you must accompany me. Resist, and I'll shoot you dead in your tracks!"

"You dare not do murder!" Dayton gasped, believing he could intimidate this brave fairy of the forest. "You dare not do murder!"

"Try me and see!" Hazel Eye said, full-cocking her revolver. "I give you until I count ten to decide whether you will go with me or not."

The villain saw that she was in earnest, without doubt, and that it was best to humor her for the present, and watch his chances.

"I'll cave," he said quickly. "Lead ahead, and I'll follow."

A smile of sarcasm wreathed Hazel Eye's cherry lips.

"How nice that would be, wouldn't it? No! Casper Dayton; I was detailed to capture you, and I have done so. Hand me your weapons now—take care! I'm watching you, and if you make a move to use one of those weapons, I'll pop you over like a flash!"

And believing that she would keep her word, the villain promptly obeyed, with a savage scowl.

"The fiends take you. What are you going to do with me?" he demanded.

"Patience and time are two of the roadways to knowledge; perseverance another. If you wait long enough and have enough patience, you will doubtless learn as to the disposition of your remains."

After she had appropriated his weapons she gave the order: "Right about, face!" and they marched off through the forest, Casper Dayton in advance, covered by Hazel Eye's pistol.

In this way they marched until they came to the Magician's cabin on the lake shore.

The door was open, and the little old man sat upon the doorsteps, smoking his pipe in the moonlight which streamed down through an opening in the trees.

As Casper Dayton saw him he gave a violent start, and mechanically reached toward his belt; but Hazel Eye pushed him forward at the muzzle of her weapon until the villain stood in front of the Magician—stood there glaring down at him like a confined spirit of evil, worked into a frenzy.

"Sylvanus Dayton!" he gasped, his features working, his fingers opening and shutting convulsively.

"Sylvester Dayton!—you!—alive!"

"Ay! alive!" the Magician replied, as he arose and stood upon the threshold. "Alive, my devilish brother, although it is not your fault that I am. Come, Hazel Eye, bring your prisoner within the cabin."

Hazel Eye obeyed, forcing Casper Dayton forward again at the muzzle of her pistol, until he was seated upon a stool in the Magician's cabin.

The old man ignited the wick of a large oil lamp, and the blaze glancing to a mirror-like reflector lighted the room in every part.

He then turned, with folded arms, to gaze at the man sitting on the stool, under the cover of Hazel Eye's weapon.

"Yes, Casper, I am alive; but it is not thy fault," he repeated. "What brought you hither?"

"Shall I tell you?" the other replied, with a sneer. "Well, I will, then. It was to murder the son of your brother James. It was to murder him in cold blood, and take possession of our wealth at Brookfield."

"Then, you knew nothing of my whereabouts?" the Magician asked.

"No; had I suspected that you were alive and in this region, you should have died, long ere this, I assure you. But, who is this accursed brazen-faced girl?"

"Take care, Casper Dayton, lest she be so angered as to shoot you. Listen to me and you shall hear that which will surprise you. The story you told to the counterfeiter, Canada Chet, was a base lie; let me now repeat a little of the truthful history of the Daytons, for the benefit of this young auditor."

"Some years ago, there lived three brothers and an old father, in an Eastern State. The old gentleman was well fixed, in this world's goods—his wealth counted up into the hundreds of thousands, and he had no heirs until these sons of his came. Then, the old man watched them grow to manhood, and was content to die."

"Of the sons, James was the youngest, Casper the next in rank, and Sylvanus the oldest. Therefore, the old father made Sylvanus his choice, contrary to the usual way, for the youngest son is generally the one best loved because the last."

"Sylvanus was an honest, hard-working fellow; James was also industrious and inclined to be saving, but Casper was a wild, dissolute fellow, a spend-thrift and at heart a villain. No amount of good advice or persuasion, it seemed, could tempt him from his course."

"At last the good father died, and in the presence of the three brothers, the will was read."

"And such a bomb then exploded in the Dayton camp! The will was far from interesting or satisfactory to any of the brothers, except to Sylvanus, to whom the property was bequeathed, with the exception of two dollars, which was left to be divided between James and Casper."

"In case of the death of James, first, he was to have a decent burial. No provision of this kind was made for Casper. Should Sylvanus die first, the whole wealth descended to James; after his death, to Casper."

"Thus, there was a grand incentive to villainy, and one which you, Casper Dayton, made haste to embrace. I had never believed you capable of actual crime, but I found out to my cost that you were, for one night as I was coming along a gloomy highway, I was attacked by you, and knocked senseless from my horse. You then threw my body into the river, where you calculated I should die by drowning."

"Kind hands rescued me, however, and I was taken to the cottage of a widow, where I was restored to consciousness. But the terrible blow had unsettled my brain; and there followed a sort of insanity that was intermittent, however—not constant."

"At times I was of sound mind. Then would come on one of the strange spells in which I feared you—feared my God—feared everybody except the widow and her daughter, a baby then. To them I took kindly, for I believed them my friends."

"A strange, headless body was found in the river the next day, attired in the clothing of Sylvanus Dayton, and was taken and buried, and a large circle of mourning friends wept over the coffin of the supposed murdered owner of Brookfield. But it was only the body of some unknown person who had been fished out of the river, and substituted, by my directions."

"Thus, Casper Dayton, you supposed you were rid of me, and you turned your attention to watching an opportunity to strike your remaining brother—the obstacle which stood between you and the heritage of Brookfield."

"While I, seized with my insane fear of you and the world, fled the country. First, however, I married the Widow Walling, and took her and her child with me. I penetrated to the very depths of the wilderness, and finally came into this remote region, where I have since remained."

"My wife died, when Hazel Eye, here, was a mere child, and I have brought her up to suit myself. But

all my life since you dealt me that cowardly blow, I have been possessed of those strange spells of fear. Lately they have come upon me less frequently, and you behold me now not afraid of you, Casper Dayton!"

"Ha! ha! we shall see about that, my crazy brother! I shall yet have my revenge upon you. What do you intend to do with me?"

"Nothing. I shall free you, and tell you to go, warning you to keep your distance from this cabin, which is so constructed that death lurks within every timber. Go! I say, and may the spirit of Almighty God release you from your doom in the coming hell. Show him out, Hazel Eye."

Hazel Eye nodded, and motioned Casper Dayton toward the door with her revolver.

He arose hastily to depart, glad at the opportunity to thus get off, but on the threshold he paused.

"I go; but you shall see me again, mark my word. The blow I struck, years ago, shall be repeated, soon, in a stronger way. I bid you adieu!"

And, with a mocking laugh, he wheeled, and disappeared into the night.

Hazel Eye arose and closed the door after him; then turned toward the Magician.

"Why did you let him go? He's a bold, bad man, and he will not hesitate to do you injury."

"I fear him not now, as I used to; I have shaken off the insanity that has been the cloud of my life, and I am prepared to fight odds with science and strategy. I did not touch him, because he is my brother, and I would have no man's blood upon my hands. But I have warned him to keep away from my cabin; if he comes now, his blood be on his own head."

"What would you do?"

"Blow the cabin to atoms. I have every timber so charged with various explosives, that I can arrange it that when I leave the cabin and close the door, no one can thereafter open that door without blowing up the whole building. It is an infernal invention, but I have warned them; and those who would not die, must heed the warning."

"But tell me, am I the child of the widow whom you married years ago?"

"The same. I am your step-father, instead of your grandfather, as you have always called me. I have ever regarded you as my own child, and loved you as such."

"But if I am in no way related to you, it is not right for me to live upon your bounty."

"Tut! tut! child; banish any such ideas, for you are as dear to me and as much my daughter, as though you were in reality a child of my own blood. But, now, this can no longer be your home. I have decided to quit this wilderness, if I can, and return to Brookfield, my old home. But, ere I go, there is work for me to do in the forest; and, too, I would not be far away when this cabin blows up. Therefore, take your necessary trappings and your horse, and go to the cabin of the Dwarf Destroyer, where I will join you later. Be careful not to fall into the power of the red-men, with whom the forest swarms."

"You need not fear," Hazel Eye replied. "I have never yet been taken an Indian's captive, and I do not believe my luck has deserted me."

Ten minutes later, both the Magician and Hazel Eye had quitted the cabin.

In the meantime, the red demons of Sitting Bull, under the orders of Casper Dayton, had augmented their strength in numbers in the forest, and descended upon the "Choppings," a hundred or more strong, from nearly every point of the compass.

They poured from the forest on the south, east and west, and landed from the lake in canoe-loads on the north.

The night rung like a pandemonium with their yells; the screams of terrified women and children, the hoarse shouts and curses of men, and the reports of rifle-shots made a Babel of the settlement.

The town was surrounded on every hand, and the red demons fought as if possessed of demoniac fury.

None were spared, as had been the directions of Casper Dayton. The reeking tomahawk and smoking repeating rifles, with which many of the red fiends were armed, did the deadly work for each pale-face, regardless of age or sex, and the terrible scalping-knife flashed and gleamed in the ghastly moonlight.

Soon the firebrand reached the cabins, and the flames licked up with greed the homes of those who lay dead upon the crimsoned ground, or were still fighting desperately for their lives.

But it was useless for them to contend against odds. Soon it was that the last survivor fell, and the last reeking scalp was "raised," and nothing remained to tell of the existence of the great counter-fitting town of the North-west but a few smoking logs and glowing coals and the dead bodies, around which the red fiends of the forest were dancing and yelling.

And about this time Casper Dayton stood upon the opposite shore of the lake, and gazed across upon the scene with a devilish delight.

"They have done well," he said, in a low tone; "but, furies! what do I see? Curses on the idiots! They have burned the Pen, with its dies and presses and stock! I wish now that I had not sent them, for I have burdened my soul with another crime without receiving a consideration for my awful sins."

CHAPTER XV.

THE CABIN FORTRESS—VENGEANCE SELF-WROUGHT.

We must now return to Old Anaconda and the girls, whom we left fleeing before the flame and smoke of the burning forest.

It is unnecessary to add that they ran for dear life, for such was the case. The lurid tongues, driven by the wind and the flame current, chased

them with the hissing perseverance of a snake; the smoke blinded and choked them, but still they kept on, struggling bravely.

"Don't get discouraged," the Dwarf Destroyer advised. "We haven't fer ter go afore we sight my cabin. I reckon. Keep on a bit longer."

And, like heroines the brave females did keep on, despite the rough footing, and scratching and tearing of the bushes.

At last Old Anaconda uttered a cry of satisfaction, for they had arrived at the edge of the large clearing wherein stood his cabin, or "fort" as he often called it. It was a large structure of logs, with a single door, and windows up near the eaves. It was built in the most serviceable manner, and was a good retreat wherein to keep off the red-skins, for loopholes covered the wall in nearly all points of the compass, so that approach from any side of the clearing was well guarded.

On the edge of the clearing Old Anaconda and his charges paused, while he gazed sharply toward the cabin.

"What is it?" Wild Bird asked, noticing the sudden compression of his lips. "Does the White Destroyer scent danger again, near his cabin?"

"Waal, I low there's sumthing gone wrong, twixt you an' me. Thar's sumbody, Injun or white galoot, gone an' taken persession o' my domicyle, yander, sure's I'm a reflexion uv ther Darwin theory."

"Who is it?"

"Durn me ef I know, though I'll allow they're white, for no Injun 'd be werry likely ter start a smoke, not ef they war layin' low, fer me."

"Then let us hurry forward and get out of danger," Milly Owen said, eagerly.

"Not yet, by a long shot! I opine I'm a-goin' ter know more afore I stick my pericranium inter a hornet's nest. Fust uv all, I'm goin' ter larn how thick ther Injuns be hayrabouts."

And enjoining the girls to remain where they were, the scout moved away along the border of the clearing, to make his reconnaissance.

In about ten minutes he returned, and glanced uneasily toward the cabin.

"We've got to git out o' this," he said, "fer thar's a hull pack o' red hellions out hayr in the forest, a-sneakin' up in our rear. We must make fer my leetle fort, yander, an' ef we git a blizzard frum concealed enemies, I opine ef won't be our fault. I'd rather an Injun'd skulp me, any time, than a white, but—come along!"

Seizing each other's hands, the three girls followed swiftly after the old scout, across the clearing toward the cabin. The distance was not great, and they were soon within a few yards of the cabin, when Old Anaconda gave vent to an overjoyed whoop, as the cabin door swung open, and a crowd of men stood upon the threshold to welcome the fugitives.

At the same time the savages burst from the forest at a point the fugitives had just quitted, with wild yells of baffled defeat.

"Oh! yell, grol durn yer pesky pelts!" the Dwarf Destroyer howled, shaking his fist back at the murderous mob, in defiance. "Ye ken't ketch yer uncle, now, fer scrip! Cum along, ye long-eared, lantern-jawed, alabasted, knock-kneed sous uv tan-bark! Cum an' see us."

This kind invitation the savages had no idea of accepting, for the present, evidently, for they paused upon the edge of the timber for a confab.

In the meantime Old Anaconda and the girls reached and entered the cabin in safety, after which the door was closed and barred, and they could well bid defiance to their foes, for the time being.

Explanations ensued, and the union of the whites in that cabin, in the wilderness, was one of decided joy.

The occupants of the cabin ahead of Old Anaconda and the girls, were the fugitives from the Choppings, among them Dave, Hal, Harry and old Alex Watchman. On their arrival at the cabin, they had found it occupied by no less an individual than the redoubtable Amasa Scroggs of Kalamazoo.

Out of the Dwarf's wardrobe, they had found enough clothing to cover their nakedness, so that they were comfortably installed by the time of the arrival of Old Anaconda and his trio.

The Dwarf's larder was never unstocked; consequently dinner was first in requisition.

The getting-up of this was left to the culinary skill of Milly Owen, Rachel, and Wild Bird, while the men kept a vigilant watch from the loopholes on either side and end of the cabin.

"Them ripsallions ar' up ter sum deviltry, ye kin bet yer boots!" the Destroyer muttered, watching the eastern forest keenly. "See! thar's haydoogins o' 'em thar in the edge o' ther timber, a-skulkin' about like as ef they war narvous. I opine they ar' waitin' fer night ter arrive."

"Injuns!" said Amasa Scroggs, contemptuously; "who's afeard o' them? Why, ther ken't be many o' them left, I tell ye, fer I slaughtered off sumthin' like ten thusan' as I war cumin' heer, by way of amusin' myself. Tain't much ter brag on ter kill an Injun."

"Et depends sum'at ef a feller's a consarned coward or not," Anaconda said, dryly. "Ye ken't expect much o' a man whose narves flies out o' his mouth when a bloody Injun sculp is lowered before his eyes. Ef he's a brave man, show me a coward."

Amasa colored to the roots of his hair, and pretending not to notice the sarcasm, which elicited a broad smile from all hands, he turned to give some fatherly advice to Dave and Hal, of whom he had assumed the right of guardian, now that he had found them. When nobody was near, however, he approached the Dwarf Destroyer, mysteriously.

"See heer!" he said, in a whisper; "you're a purty good sorter feller, an' ef ye'll jest keep cluss-mouthed about thet leetle affair, I'll make et all right wi'

you. Ye see, I've kinder took a shine ter thet Rachel over thar, an' I want ter make an impression ef I can."

"All right! Sail in, and I'll not bother ye ag'in," the Dwarf Destroyer said, with a sparkle in his eyes. And Amasa did sail in evidently, for he did the agreeable and gallant, as well as he knew how, to Rachel Connors all the afternoon, although she gave him many a slight and hint that his company was not agreeable.

The dinner prepared by the three girls was soon served, and proved liberal and satisfactory to the hungry ones in the wilderness.

The afternoon passed away, but there was no hostile movement on the part of the savages on the edge of the forest. They were occasionally seen skulking about, just out of rifle range, but made no demonstration calculated to incite those in the cabin to more than ordinary watchfulness.

Anaconda, however, was not to be thrown off his guard. He was ceaselessly watchful, and warned those within the cabin to be prepared for almos. any surprise.

"Oh! ye'll heer 'em blow ther bugles, afore long, you bet yer boots!" he said, in response to Hal Dayton's inquiry. "They're waitin' fer darkness ter cum on, I allow, an' expect reinforcements; then there'll be church musick in ther air keyed in Yankee Doodle meter."

"Is Old Sitting Bull over there, now?"

"Nary, I opine. He's ther werry same high cockolorum they're waitin' fer. When he comes, ye'll notis a renewed activity in the ranks. Thar'll be a genywine red-skin convention, over thar."

The afternoon gave place to the oncoming night. The change of wind had swept the forest fire to the North, and the sun went down over a horizon that was smoky and dim.

The deep shadows crept on apace, and gathered thickly over the woods and clearing, wherein stood the lone cabin.

"Mebby we shall get a blizzard frum them 'ar copper-coats afore moon-up," the Destroyer announced; "so ye'd better all grapple a shutin' arm, an' hunt yerself a convenient loophole. Thar's plenty of weapons, yonder in the chimbley closet!"

All made haste to arm themselves except Rachel Connors. She knew nothing about fire-arms, she said, and would peddle the ammunition to those who stood on guard.

The anticipated attack before moon-rise did not occur, but it did not make the occupants of the cabin feel any easier. They knew that it must come sooner or later.

The moon rose above the forest of trees like a ball of fire coming out of a bloody bath, and shone down into the clearing brightly, revealing each object as clear as day, from the cabin.

"Now look sharp. If you see any object in the grass, of a suspicious nature, let it have, kerslap!" Anaconda ordered.

A second later the keen eyes of the Dwarf caught sight of a tuft in the tall grass that grew in the clearing, and uttered a grunt. It might or might not be the top-knot of a concealed savage—eight out of every ten men would have passed it over without a thought of suspicion. Not so with old Anaconda. Experience had long since taught him, that a very small place of ambush could secrete a lurking red-skin.

Thrusting his rifle into a loophole, he took a quick, accurate aim and fired. Then he withdrew his rifle and peered out into the moonlight.

The veteran Destroyer had not missed his guess in the least, for that suspicious tuft was now lively enough, and an Indian death-yell pealed out shrilly upon the quiet of the night.

"Jerusalem! Gosh-all-fish-hooks! how in thunder'd ye kno' thet varmint war thar?" Amasa Scroggs demanded, in genuine astonishment, while the others expressed their surprise in sundry ejaculations.

"The White Destroyer sees like the owl and the lynx," Wild Bird said, proud of her lover's wonderful shot. "He is a great chief among the pale-faces!"

"Durned good shot; that's a fac'," Scroggs admitted; "but, then, thar's been greater ones. My old uncle, Saltpeper Scroggs, once tuk a gun an' shot a woodpecker off on a meetin'-us-teepel, an' put a bullet plumb through his eye. Then, he ag'in shot a muskeeter, so fur off, thet he hed ter take a field-glass ter tell whar he waz. See'd thet myself, by ther all-fired jingoes!"

"Phew! Mebbe I don't see a lock of hair, too!" Hal Dayton said, peering out into the clearing.

"Just watch me while I raise an Injun!"

All did look, and listened to the report of his rifle; saw an Indian leap up out of the grass, with a yell of defiance, and leg it for the timber-line at the top of his speed.

"You only stung him! Go ahead and drop him," Anaconda cried.

Hal took aim and fired again; but, although the noble red-man flinched, he kept on, and was out of gun-shot in a moment more.

About an hour later, those in the cabin felt the building shake and tremble, as if jarred by an earthquake, and a roar that sounded like the explosion of a thousand cannons.

"What in thunder's ther meaning of that?" Old Anaconda grunted, peering out. But, nothing could be seen to excite suspicion.

Had he been in the vicinity of the home of Sylvanus Dayton, the Magician, but a few minutes before, he would have found the cabin surrounded by yelling red-skins, headed by the white villain, Casper Dayton.

"He is in there, curse him!" the renegade cried. "Go, open the door, you pack of yelling idiots!"

But, the savages were shy of the cabin, and could

not be persuaded to touch a timber of what they believed to belong to the Evil One.

"Curse you all for a pack of coyotes!" Casper Dayton cried. "Stop your infernal screeching, while I order the man inside to surrender!"

The Indians quieted down, and then the white renegade advanced and knocked on the door.

"Come! open up, if you don't want the cabin torn over your head, Sylvanus Dayton! No delay now!" he ordered.

But there came no answer. Within all was dark, and silent as a tomb.

Again did the renegade pound, and call aloud. Still no answer.

The savages had crowded back at a respectful distance, and were watching, with their hands on their scalping-knives expecting each moment that a horde of imps infernal would rush out upon them.

"Curse the luck! I'll break open the door, and kill him myself!" the infuriated scoundrel cried, and seizing a heavy rock, he hurled it with all his strength against the door.

The door burst open with a crash!

At the same instant there was a blinding flash; then a tremendous report—a terrific explosion that rent the cabin into thousands of atoms—fossing great timbers into the air—blowing up trees, and creating a horrible havoc.

Eight of the savages escaped uninjured; the rest, including Casper Dayton, were torn and mangled and their remains scattered in every direction!

CHAPTER XVI.

RED-HOT ARROWS.

THOSE within the cabin of Old Anaconda were puzzled to account for the explosion, and opinions differed—that of the old scout being that Indians had been fooling about the cabin of the Magician, and had, unwittingly, caused the explosion by tampering with some of the old man's secrets of defense.

The Indians on the edge of the clearing seemed startled, and were seen retreating into the woods.

"They're goin' ter see what ther rumpus is," the Dwarf Destroyer said. "Let 'em go. I only hope they will fergit ter come back again."

"The Sioux will return in great numbers, an' we'll have a siege," said old Alex. Watchman.

"Yas, I opine thar'll be sum fun by-an'-by frum them pesky hornets. Let 'em come, tho'! Thar's enuff in this leetle shell ter defend it, an' lots o' powder an' ball. So thet of them Injuns git our scalps, et ain't my fault."

The Indians did not return immediately, but those within the cabin did not relax their vigilance, for they were constantly expecting the savages' return, and some sudden surprise in Indian craft.

Hal Dayton positioned himself by the side of pretty Milly Owens as a sort of protector, while the comely Rachel was zealously guarded by the man from Michigan, Amasa Scroggs, and the long, lean comrade of Hal, Dave Laam. Dave had no notion of looking favorably upon the woman who was, unfortunately, the wife of Canada Chet, the outlaw, but he caught an appealing glance from her eyes, and resolved to teach the Yankee a lesson.

Amasa, however, could not be induced to leave his post by hints, and accordingly, when an opportunity offered, Dave called Amasa aside, looking as threatening as possible.

"See here, you ignorant blunderbuss!" he said, sternly, although secretly amused, "do you know what I've a mind to do with you?"

"Jerusalem, no!" Amasa replied, in evident alarm.

"What's the matter?"

"Well, if you don't keep away from Mrs. Connors yonder, who is a married woman, I'll mount you, chaw off your ear, and put a Black Hills-awning over your eye."

"Gosh all fish-hooks! you don't mean it, do ye?"

"Well, you continue your course of sprouts, and see if I don't."

That settled it.

Amasa retired from the field, and Rachel Connors was not annoyed by him again.

The night dragged by; the moon arose to zenith, and began to dip toward the west. Still there was no attack—no sight of the Indians.

"Isn't it a little queer about their keeping shady so long?" Hal Dayton asked, anxiously.

"Yas, I opine thar is thet same," the Dwarf Destroyer replied. "But we ain't agoin' ter be kept much longer in waitin'. Thar!—what'd I tell ye."

He pointed toward the eastern timber belt, from which a figure had emerged, and was rapidly crossing the clearing toward the cabin.

"It's Hazel Eye, the Forest Lily," the Destroyer said. "I wonder what brings her here?"

"Hazel Eye is a beacon of warning," Wild Bird said. "She always appears when there is danger, and leaves when danger is over."

"Waal, now, ef them ain't facts, when I come to think about it, I don't want a cent," Anaconda said, earnestly. "Some one open the door and let the gal in."

Harry Reynolds eagerly officiated in the capacity of door-opener, and was quite repaid for his trouble by receiving a surprised, glad glance from Hazel Eye's pretty, sparkling orbs, as she saw him.

She entered the cabin, and was warmly received by Anaconda, Wild Bird and Kitty Owen, while Harry Reynolds stood modestly back, content with the knowledge that he should soon have her for himself.

After the first greetings were exchanged, Hazel Eye glanced around the cabin, and nodded her head commendingly, as she saw that every person except

Rachel Connors was armed, and had positioned themselves at a convenient loophole.

"It is well," she said, turning to Anaconda, "for you'll need every gun and arm you have to defend yourselves from merciless butchery. The woods are full of savages, who are creeping toward the edge of the glade on its every approach."

"Let 'em come, we ain't agoin' ter take no slack from them, I'll allow, ef we are little," the Dwarf scout said, with a grin. "I reckon we ked drop the crowd, afore they'd get across the clearin'."

"I don't know about that. The red-skins are double your strength in numbers, and have armed themselves with strong bows that will shoot a red-hot arrow a great distance."

"Oh! they're goin' ter persuade us w' fire, eh?" and the eyes of the Indian-hater sparkled with a dangerous light. "They're agoin' ter burn us out, be they, the varmints?"

"That is evidently their intention," Hazel Eye replied.

"Is old Sitting Bull with them now?"

"No; the chief has suddenly disappeared, and the red-skins believe he has returned to the village for more warriors."

"Reckon mebbe some galoot's tapped the old son of a sea-cook on the noggin! Ef sech be the case, I shall cavort and weep, fer it hes bin the sole ambition of my latter life to raise the ha'r of thet old red cutthroat. By the way, gal, what war thet explosion a while ago?"

"It was the blow-up of the Magician's cabin, on Beaver Lake. A white renegade and a number of Indians were killed."

Rachel Connors started forward, eagerly.

"His name! his name!" she gasped, her form trembling and features working. "Was it Canada Chet?"

"No, Mrs. Connors, it was not. This man's name was Casper Dayton. But, I have to advise you, that the ruffian, Canada Chet, was massacred, together with every person in Quinebog, during the forepart of this night!"

Before Hazel Eye had finished speaking, there was a sharp scream, and the outlaw's wife fell to the floor, as all supposed, in a swoon; but when they picked her up, they found that her heart had ceased to beat, and she was dead.

This cast a gloom over those within the cabin, for it seemed a bad omen, just when they were "before the enemy."

The body was placed upon a couch of skins, and covered up, and then a deep silence prevailed in the cabin, while they all watched for the coming of the enemy.

Harry Reynolds managed to get a few words with Hazel Eye, and a pressure of her hand, as a reassurance that she had not forgotten him since a previous meeting.

The attention of all was presently called to the eastward by Old Anaconda.

A fire had suddenly been kindled at the edge of the timber, around which several forms could be seen busied.

"Thet settles et. We're goin' ter hev the cabin fired over our heads. But we must sarcumvent sum of them red ripsallions' plans, tho'!" Old Anaconda said. "You, young man, whose handle is Dave Laam, mount up inter ther loft, whar you'll find a trap openin' out on the roof. When ye hear me screech, you open ther trap, climb out on ther roof, an' pull out the burnin' iron, sling it away, an' get back in under kiver lively, lest ye git plugged in the back."

Dave turned to obey; then Old Anaconda called to Amasa.

"Cum, ye're next tallest; you stand by ther door, an' ef an arrier strikes inter wood below ther eaves, et'll be yer duty ter knock it out w' yer gun, and skeddadle back into the cabin like Hellen Blazes."

"Lordy! Jerusalem, no! I wouldn't go out thar fer all ther money thar is 'twixt heer an' Michigan! I swow ef I would!" Amasa ejaculated, in horror.

"Gosh all fish-hooks, no! D'ye s'pose I want ter git all stuck full o' arrers like porkypine quills?"

"Oh! ho! ye're a wuss coward than I thort ye war," the Dwarf cried. "Ef natur hed only made me a few feet longer, you wouldn't find me a-askin' you ter go!"

"I wish ter gracious natur' hed made ye tall, then," Amasa growled.

"Cum! git yer position thar, near the door, so thet ye can scud out when I yell. None of yer whinin' now, ef ye don't want me to shoot you."

"Oh, Lordy! Jerusalem! I don't want to go out there—boo-hoo-o-o-o!" and the big lubber from Kal-amazoo actually began to cry.

"Shet up yer bellerin, you big buttermilk calf! Ef thar's an Injun or a dog ever grow'd as war a bigger nuisance than you, I'd like to see him!" Anaconda said, fiercely.

"Let the poor man alone," Hazel Eye said, taking compassion on him. "Perhaps he cannot help being afraid. Give me a long stick and I will fill the place, if I am not very tall."

"Thankee, miss, thankee," Amasa said, the huge tears streaming down his face. "I'm much obleeged to ye, fer goin'."

"Here, let me go! I am glad of the chance to git a breath of open air, and am not afraid of gitting hit," Harry Reynolds said, coming forward.

And so it was arranged.

The occupants of the cabin selected loopholes at both sides and ends of the cabin, so as to guard the approach on all sides, for it was suspected that the forest on every side of the clearing was swarming with Indians.

Old Anaconda directed his attention to the east, for the time being, leaving Wild Bird to the west, Hal to the north, and Hazel Eye to the south, with

the remainder of the company equally divided in the different locations.

The first arrow from the east shot out of the edge of the timber like a rocket, and soared upward like a star. But the air had cooled the steel, and it was seen coming on its journey only for the space of a few seconds.

"Thet leetle arrier will never reach heer!" Anaconda averred, with an odd laugh. "They'll hev ter put on a leetle more elbow grease, ef they want ter send us any o' their bulleux-does, you bet."

He was right. The arrow fell about fifty feet short of its destination.

"Can a bullet reach the cabin from the edge of the clearing yonder?" Harry Reynolds asked.

"Yas, I reckon so, but thar ain't much danger of hittin' any one, or of gettin' hit, as the distance is suthin over a thousand yards."

"How can an arrow possibly carry such a distance?"

"Ordinary 'uns ken't. Ye see them as they ar' shuttin' now, ar' about a half-pound's weight, an' ar' sent by a strong-bow, which has twice the strength of a small bow."

All watched with interest the flight of the next arrow. Soon it was seen to soar up out of the edge of the forest, and then they lost sight of it.

An instant later there was an audible thud against the side of the cabin.

"Now's your time!" Anaconda yelled. Harry Reynolds darted out of the cabin, and with a heavy stick reached and dislodged the arrow which had already commenced to burn a hole in the wood.

He barely had time to get back into the cabin ere a perfect shower of arrows shot out from the forest on their fiery mission. Another and still another volley; then a wild, fierce war-cry rung upon the night.

"Hellen Blazes! Git ready, fer ther varmints ar' a-cumin'! Look out fer ther arrers, boys, an' we'll cover ye if we can!"

Harry Reynolds was out of the cabin by the time the arrows had struck, using his cudgel against such as were below the eaves, with a vigor that proved he was born of heroic stuff. When he had finished his part of the dangerous job, he glanced upon the roof, and perceived that it was literally stuck full of arrows.

Dave was working bravely, but the fire was gaining headway, seeing which Harry dashed into the cabin, and up onto the roof, to assist in tearing out the fiery barbs.

In the meantime the red devils were swarming toward the cabin from all sides, howling and yelling the best they knew how, as they came, believing that an easy victory was guaranteed them.

Indeed, it did look rather dubious, as the painted demons swarmed toward the one center, in a terrible grotesque gang. But, Old Anaconda was not the one to say die when there was a chance for living, and his order rung out, stern and sharp:

"Fire! Let 'em have yer compliments—gol darn ye, let 'em have, I say, an' don't waste a shot. Make every chunk o' lead count, fer ef ye don't we're a gone set o' coons. When they get in, next ter ther cabin, we may's well say our kitenkisms, an' lay down an' die!"

Crack! bang! went the weapons in sharp concert, answered by fierce Indian yells and death-cries; crack! bang! crack! bang! Would the incessant rattle never stop?

They were fighting for life and liberty, were these confined pale-faces, and bravely, determinedly, too.

Every bullet counted a death in the Indian ranks; the volleys caused them to waver; then they came on again, howling and yelling like mad!

Dave Laam had left the burning roof, carrying the senseless form of Harry Reynolds in his arms.

And the arrows were not all out.

The cabin is surely doomed!

CHAPTER XVII.

CONCLUSION.

"It's no use stayin' up thar," he gasped, dropping Reynolds on the floor. "We're both riddled with bullets, and Harry here, I guess, is dead!"

Hazel Eye uttered a scream of anguish, and ran forward to kneel at the side of the unconscious lad. She placed her hand upon his heart—then gave an exultant exclamation.

"He lives—he lives, for his heart still beats!"

While Hazel Eye and Kitty Owen devoted their attention to caring for wounded Harry and Dave, the others were keeping up a steady fire upon the advancing enemy. For Old Anaconda's little "fort" was well supplied with ammunition, and the rifle-barrels grew hot as the hurricane of bullets continued to fly.

But, fire as rapidly as they might they could not keep the swarms of red demons back, and it was only a matter of a few minutes when the cabin was completely surrounded by the howling horde. And as they kept below the range of the loopholes there was no chance for our band of fugitives to score a point.

What then remained?

Death stared them in the face—death in one of its most horrible phases.

Death by fire, or by surrendering to the tender mercies of the scalping knife. These were the only two alternatives.

Old Anaconda gazed around into the faces of those within the cabin. Each face was a shade paler than usual, although begrimed with powder and smoke.

Harry Reynolds had recovered consciousness, and after having a bullet extracted from his shoulder, he was able to stand alone. Dave Laam had also been

relieved of several leaden messengers, but was very weak.

The Dwarf Destroyer gave vent to a stifled curse, as he listened to the triumphant howls of the red hellions on the outside.

They were making no attack, for they knew that the burning cabin must soon rout out the concealed pale-faces.

With a grim nod of his head, Old Anaconda ascended into the loft, and took a peep out of the man-hole onto the roof.

One glance satisfied him.

The whole roof was in one blinding blaze—burning rapidly, fanned by a stiff breeze which had sprung up, and came bowling down from the north.

He returned to the ground floor, and once more glanced into the faces of his men. Alarm was expressed there, but they were yet resolute and determined to fight to the death.

"What's to be did?" old Alex. Watchman demanded, in his quiet manner. "Stay here and stare death face to face, or make a rush?"

"Neither. Listen! By all that's glorious, *help is coming!*" cried Hal Dayton, as the echo of a horn came faintly to their ears.

"God be praised, then, for it is true!" Old Anaconda cried, leaping to a loophole and peering out toward the east. "Yonder comes a cavalcade of mounted Manitoba volunteers to our succor!"

The savages made the discovery about the same time as those inside the burning cabin, and advancing abreast, in military style, prepared to open fire upon the horsemen, as soon as they came within range.

But, forgetful of the rear, they made an advance just far enough to expose their persons to the loopholes' range.

Anaconda had been watching for this, and took advantage of it.

Every loophole on the eastern side of the cabin was manned, and, at a given signal, a volley of leaden death poured into the line of savages, mowing them down like grass before the scythe.

At the same time there was a toot of a bugle, and the mounted police charged forward, with speaking rifles.

What could be the result? There was but a single alternative—flight.

With howls of defeat the savages scattered in every direction, and fled at the top of their speed.

While Old Anaconda flung open the door, and the besieged pioneers—if so they might be called—all escaped into the open air, just a moment before the roof of the burning cabin fell in with a crash.

The volunteers then rode up in triumph, and a gladsome welcome they received.

Among them was James Dayton, the father of Hal, who, coming in search of his son, had enlisted the Manitobans in his service, together with a squad of picked scouts, and it turned out that they arrived upon the scene just in the nick of time.

The defeat of the savages was so great that they fled from the neighborhood, not offering further molestation.

Preparations were made for an early departure from the region.

Horses were found in the forest belonging to the Indians, and appropriated, so that each person had a mount.

They were ready to leave the vicinity of the burning cabin, when a queer object was seen crossing the clearing, and the mysterious Demon of the Forest soon stood close at hand.

Not long, however, for the huge grotesque head was seen to part in the back, and out rolled a human body, doubled up like a ball. This unfolded, and in a moment more Sylvanus Dayton, the Magician, stood upon his feet, and the Demon of the Forest was no more. The whole secret of the Demon, amounted to the fact that Dayton was one of those "boneless" wonders of the human race, and was able to roll himself into a ball, and get inside the Walking Head, which was manufactured out of buffalo hide, with artificial eyes and ears.

These he worked from the inside, by the aid of his hands.

Another reunion took place between the two long-separated brothers, which we have not space to relate in detail; then the whole party bade adieu to the wilds of the North-west, first, however, interring the body of Rachel Connors, near Old Anaconda's cabin.

The Daytons are now in Ottawa, and an equal division of the wealth between James and Sylvanus placed them forever above pecuniary want.

Hazel Eye lives with her step-father, and at no distant day will probably become the wife of Harry Reynolds, while Kitty Owen as the adopted daughter of James Dayton, will no doubt in time wed Happy Hal.

Old Anaconda has wedded Wild Bird, and they live happily together in the North-west. Two trappers stop with them, occasionally, in the persons of Dave Laam and Alex. Watchman. The rest of those who escaped from the Pen, dispersed their various ways.

Amasa Scroggs satisfied with his experience in the far North-west has returned to Michigan and settled down. We believe he has recently "doubled," with a hoosier lady.

Sitting Bull is not dead yet, which is much to be regretted. He has now under his control some two thousand braves, ready for any attempt that the government or individuals may make to punish him for his awful crimes.

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